TWELVE SERMONS.

By JOHN GROSE, A.M. F.A.S.

Curate of the United Parishes of St. Margaret Pattens, and St. Gabriel Fenchurch;

Lecturer of St. Olave, Southwark;

And Chaplain to the Rt. Hon. Countess Dowager Mexborough.

LONDON.

PRINTED BY
Thomas North,
Little Tower Street.

SOLD BY MESSRS. RIVINGTON'S, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH YARD;

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1800.

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PREFACE.

THE following Discourses are offered to public notice with the utmost deference and respect. Instead of affecting any claim to literary merit, they are only exhibited as a part of those professional labours in which the writer is constantly engaged. Whether amidst the numerous works of genius, and celebrity, which dignify the present age, this humble effort may be considered an intrusion, must be left to the decision of the candid, and impartial. If a sincere, and ardent wish to promote the interests of religion, and virtue; to recommend internal piety, and practical holiness; and to urge the importance of religion as seated in the heart, and amending the life: if these motives will furnish a sufficient apology for giving publicity to this work, they are readily offered, with a hope that the plea will not be altogether inadmissible, or unjust.

PREFACE.

The doctrines which are principally enforced in these Discourses are, the fallen state of human nature,—the turpitude, and guilt of sin,—the purity, and extent of the moral law,—the absolute need of an expiatory atonement for sin,—and the full, finished, and perfect redemption, which Christ hath accomplished for the guilty. And whilst they point out from the authority of holy writ, that Christ is the way, the truth, and the life,—and the only name given under heaven whereby we can be saved;—they no less recommend to our serious attention, the *morality* of the gospel, and the inseparable union of faith, and practice.—Whilst they assert the absolute need of regenerating grace, and the blessed agency of the Holy Spirit; they uniformly urge the importance of cultivating those Christian graces, which peculiarly adorn our holy religion.—These are the prominent features of the Discourses now offered to public view; and which are written in strict conformity to the

doctrines contained in the articles, homilies, and liturgy of our excellent establishment.—After offering my grateful acknowledgments to those numerous, and kind friends, who have so liberally patronised this work; I can only add, that if this humble effort should be instrumental in any degree to promote the interests of truth, and virtue,—of pure, and undefiled religion,—it will amply repay my labours:—and whilst the pleasing reflection of being useful to others, shall afford a secret gratification, which is easier conceived than expressed, let all the glory be ascribed to Him, who is the alone author, and giver of every good, and perfect gift.

28 SE60

Prince's Square, St. George's in the East,
October 1, 1800.

SERMON I.

PSALM VIII. VER. 3, 4,

"When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers; the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?"

THIS sublime and elegant pastoral is supposed to have been written by David, whilst he was a youth, watching his father's flocks, in the still serenity of the night, and under the expanded canopy of heaven. Far remote from the busy walks of men, his mind was wrapt in holy contemplation on his God! Surveying the works of nature, and admiring the planetary orbs, he is deeply impressed with a reverential awe of the Divine Majesty, on whose uncontroulable will, and unerring wisdom, the universe is itself suspended!—The stillness of the night leads him to meditate, unimpeded, on the grandeur of the scene.

The animal and vegetable world, seems entombed in sleep. The tuneful choristers of the air have retired to the leafy bough, and postponed their song till the break of day. But the pious stripling, formed to live in another world, looks upward to the bespangled sky, and contemplates the wonders of almighty power!—Struck with the vast provision that is made for the ease, and accommodation of man, whose path is strewed with bounties, and loaded with a rich profusion of benefits, we find David exclaiming, in the fervour of holy admiration, with the irresistible impulse of grateful joy,—"When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?"

These words naturally lead us to a view,

1st. Of God's mindfulness of man.

2d. The duties which a consideration of the divine benevolence, should induce us studiously to perform.

The works of nature are only the varied emanations of nature's God. If, in the foliage of every rising plant that decorates our path, we are justly impressed with admiration at the wisdom of him, who formeth all things by the word of his power; our wonder and delight must rise in an infinite proportion, when we contemplate the glories of the upper world,—the stars, which are guided in their course,—the bright luminary, whose radiance extends to the remotest corners of the earth, which animates, vivifies, and enlivens universal nature:—and the clouds, suspended on the mighty fiat of the Supreme Intelligence, who ruleth over the armies of heaven, and amidst all the inhabitants of the earth. When we think of his uncreated majesty, in whose view the very heavens are not pure, and before whom even angels veil their faces,—we are filled with admiration and gratitude at his condescending pity and compassion, manifested towards the race of man. In contemplating the works of nature, we are led to the profoundest adoration of God, and to the most humbling view of ourselves.

Whilst we admire the wisdom and goodness of him, who formed this well-ordered universe out of a confused chaos,—who decorates the azure sky,—who guides the silver moon, and who gives radiance to the luminary of day,—who replenishes the earth with his bounties,—who spreads a verdured carpet round the tender plant, and invigorates the stately tree;—we are fired with holy gratitude at the care, the attention, the mercy, and forbearance which he shews, towards his dependent creature man. Like the high-priest of nature, man walks forth amidst the varied bounties of indulgent heaven. The earth teems with provision for his daily support,—the air wafts its refreshing gales,—the ocean affords us a rich profusion of dainties, and extends its munificence to even distant climes. Well then may we exclaim in the language of the text,—"What is man that thou art mindful of him?" What is he by nature or practice? Whence came he, or what is his ultimate destination?—"Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hand; thou hast put all things under

his feet: all sheep, and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas."—After this reviewal, the pious stripling, in rapturous admiration, says, "O Lord our God! how excellent is thy name in all the earth!"*—A view of the divine benevolence naturally leads us to enquire into the character, conduct, and excellence of those, on whom the blessings of infinite goodness are thus principally bestowed.

Is it for the happiness of man, that universal nature hourly diffuses its choicest blessings? And what is the requital that we make?—Is it unabating gratitude, and uniform obedience?—Let facts and experience exhibit the melancholy contrast. Though we are dignified by the powers of intellect, and are endowed with faculties of the most acute and discriminating nature;—though the mind is rendered capable of contemplating the sublimest objects, and is furnished with ample means of improvement;—yet we fatally pervert our benefits, and forget the indulgent Author of all our mercies!—

* PSALM viii. 5th to 9th ver.

Our Reason, instead of yielding to the obedience of Faith, assumes a dictatorial power, and denies what it cannot fully comprehend. Our Understanding is blinded by prejudice: and, under the influence of a depraved and vitiated nature, our Will is controuled by tumultuous passions, and biassed by evil and corrupt propensities.

Man, therefore, is fallen from that state of innocence in which he was originally created, and is by nature depraved in his affections, in his judgment, and in the prevailing tenor of his conduct and behaviour. The heart, which once was the throne of virtue, is now the seat of every baser lust, — "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." From this polluted fountain springs every evil thought and atrocious crime. Here the affections, which once were dedicated to God, are now devoted to the world, and occupied in the pursuit of every carnal gratification. Hence the Apostle describes us, in our unrenewed state, as "dead in trespasses and sins,"—and as "by nature the children of wrath."*—Indeed

* Ephe. ii. 1st and 3d ver.

we are further assured, that "the carnal mind is enmity against God:"*—so that the theories which flatter and dignify human nature, are far remote from either truth, observation, or experience. Our fall in Adam is emphatically described by the Apostle, who says,—"Wherefore, as by one man, sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."†—Wonderful, then, is the goodness and mercy of God, in being mindful of man, amidst so many provocations, such accumulated guilt, wilful transgressions, ingratitude, and disobedience!—David might well exclaim, when he considered the heavens, the moon and the stars,—"What is man that thou," a pure and holy Being, "art mindful of him?"—It cannot be our merit, but God's free mercy, his eternal love, that graciously causes him to be mindful of guilty, offending man. We are criminals, and merit nothing at the hands of a holy God, but punishment. If he were strict to mark iniquity, none of us could appear before him. The utter unworthiness of man, therefore, magnifies the goodness of God, and

* Rom viii 7th ver. † Rom. v. 12th ver.

extols the freeness of divine grace. God is mindful of man every hour he breathes, thro' every stage of infancy, youth, manhood, and old age. He guards us by his providence from the cradle to the tomb. In our helpless infancy we are shielded by his power,—in childhood and youth we are guided by his wisdom,—in manhood, and old age, protected by his aid through the various temptations, difficulties, and dangers of life. But at the hour of death, when the world can afford us no relief,—when riches profit not,—God is mindful of the true believer. Then will he support us by his presence through the dark valley;—then will ministering angels guard our bed, and conduct us securely home;—then will he increase our faith, animate our hopes, and apply by the agency of his Holy Spirit the efficacy of a Redeemer's blood, which cleanseth from all sin, to heal the wounds of a guilty conscience, and to prepare us for our last and trying hour!

God was mindful of his people from all eternity, before the foundation of the world. "That in the ages to come he might shew

the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards us, through Christ Jesus."* He devised a way for our final happiness, consistent with every attribute of justice; and which perpetuates the claims of holiness, whilst it confers the benefits of forgiveness. Thus, in the fulness of time, God was so mindful of man, as to quit the realms of glory to take on him our nature in all things, sin only excepted,—to bear the insults and reproaches of offending mortals,—to traverse inhospitable desarts,—to endure persecution, and distress,—to become, literally, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. How did he manifest his mindfulness of our lost and miserable condition by nature, when he was arraigned before Pilate,—falsely accused,—buffeted and mocked, and at length crucified between two thieves! —Was it thus that the Son of Man was pleased to visit us in our low estate?—He bore our offences on the accursed tree, and endured the punishment due to our transgressions!—Hear him exclaiming, with the pungency of grief, "My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me!"—This was the mighty effort of divine

* Ephe. ii. ver. 7.

philanthropy!—To this we owe every hope of either present or future happiness!—Well may we cry out with wonder and gratitude, "Lord, what is man that thou art mindful of him?"—of sinful, weak, and miserable man, who is so often forgetful of thee!

The ever blessed and adorable Jesus also visited us with his free salvation; and endured the bitter agonies of the cross, to deliver us from the horrors of eternal condemnation. God was also mindful of us in triumphing over the power of Death, and the Grave. He burst the barriers of the tomb, and rose in resplendent majesty as our great exemplar, and as the first-fruits of that glorious resurrection from the dead, to which we now look with confidence and hope. Christ is also still mindful of his people. He now pleads the merit of his own obedience in their behalf, and is touched with the feeling of our infirmities.

God is further mindful of man, in granting him the aids of his Holy Spirit, to enlighten his understanding,—to regulate his affections,—to direct his choice,—to subdue his passions,

to renew his heart,—and finally to prepare him for the enjoyment of heaven. The aids of this blessed Spirit are promised to all who sincerely ask them,—as a help to their devotions,—as a support against temptation,—as a guide to direct them through life,—and a powerful consolation in death! Thus in every stage of our being,—in every path we tread,—in the works of nature, providence and grace, the mindfulness of God to man uniformly appears. God visits us by converting grace, and turns us, by his efficacious power, from the love of sin to the love of holiness. He brings us, who by nature are afar off, nearer to himself. And he visits us with afflictions, only as the chastening of a tender Father, to correct us for our good. He knows our spiritual maladies, and the means which are best adapted to our cure.

The mindfulness of God to man, forms a prominent feature in the natural and moral world,—in our temporal and spiritual affairs; and will shine with unclouded radiance in the realms of day,—where praise will be the unceasing tribute of joy amongst the redeemed above.

I proceed now very briefly to point out the duties which a consideration of the divine benevolence ſhould induce us to perform.—As no principle will more effectually produce a virtuous life, than the generous impulse of holy gratitude; ſo God's mindfulness of man ſhould make us alſo mindful of every duty which God hath enjoined in his word, that we may pay not a partial, but an univerſal obedience to the divine precepts. We ſhould reverence thoſe oracles of truth, which can alone make us wiſe unto ſalvation; and make their unerring dictates the rule of our faith and practice,—inſtead of the capricious guidance of vain, and even diſſipated faſhions. It ſhould be our uniform ſtudy to maintain a conſcience void of offence toward God and toward men; to dignify every ſtation that we fill by integrity, diligence and uprightneſs; and to recommend the religion we profeſs, by its influence on our conduct and behaviour. Need I remark, that God, who has been thus mindful of us, hath an unrivalled claim to our affections? His glory ſhould be the conſtant aim of our lives. When we reflect, therefore, on his care in viſiting us, how can we indulge

those lusts and passions, which war against the peace, and happiness of the soul? How can we live in the neglect of his worship and his ordinances? If we are duly impressed with these benefits, how can we neglect the inspired volume, to waste our irretrievable moments in reading an insipid fiction, or a visionary romance? If we think of the divine compassion, how ought we to be emulous in virtue,—to be found striving against sin,—to mortify our corrupt passions,—and to live in all things as becometh the gospel of Christ. Let the goodness of God lead us to repentance, to renounce every evil way, and to abound in the fruits of righteousness. But as to those deluded mortals who despise even the mercies of God, and who reject the invitations of the gospel, let them remember, the hour is hastening, when their fate will be determined for ever!—The Lord will come to take vengeance on them who obey not his gospel. And we are assured, that "the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God."

Penetrated then with a deep impression of the divine compassion towards guilty man, let

us aspire after a growth in grace, and a greater conformity to the divine image, that when our great and final change shall arrive, we may be prepared to dwell with angelic spirits in the presence of the Lord!—"For all flesh is as grass,—and all the glory of man, as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away;—but the word of the Lord endureth for ever."*

* I. PETER i. 24th and 25th ver.

SERMON II.

PROVERBS IV, VER. 23.

"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."

THE fatal influence of the passions, over the wiser decisions of reason, constitutes the important conflict, the unceasing struggle, in our spiritual warfare on earth. Here it is, that through the depravity of our fallen nature, our weakness is confessedly great, and therefore we require the aids of the Holy Spirit to keep us from every surrounding temptation to evil. Through this divine assistance, which is promised to all who sincerely ask it, we are strengthened in the performance of our duty, animated with the fervour of devotion, and are enabled to regulate those tumultuous passions, which disturb our peace, and impede our progress in virtue.

"From the shallow streams of philosophy," (says an able writer,) "we must hasten to the living fountain of the Christian religion. It is the influence of God on the heart of man, the divine operation of the Holy Spirit on the spirit of human creatures, which alone can bestow a permanent tranquillity,—that peace of God which passeth all understanding,—that peace, which no human eloquence can clearly explain, but which the devout heart of the believer feels with joy and gratitude. This is the polar influence, which can alone fix the tremulous needle, and point it directly to heaven."* Aided, therefore, by a power from above, obey the injunction of the wise man in the text, and endeavour, amidst the turbulence of contending passions, to "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."

For the further investigation of these words, I shall consider,

1st. The nature of the duty here required of us.

* Knox's Christian Philosoph. vol. ii. p. 403.

2d. The reason given for this necessary care.

Were religion nothing more than a compliance with outward forms, the bare profession of a creed, or the partial discharge of customary duties; we might rest contented with a speculative faith, or a merely superficial morality of conduct. But as it is a principle of grace implanted in the heart, a re-union of the affections to their proper object, we must watch its progress or decline, its growth or decay, in the prevailing temper and disposition of our minds. The man who is devoted to a life of gaiety and dissipation, or who is wholly engaged in the pursuit of riches and honours, may profess the doctrines of Christianity, but be utterly unacquainted with the true spirit and influence of that pure and holy religion. Genuine piety is seated in the affections, and displays itself in our choice, or in our most favourite pursuits. If we feel no delight in keeping the commandments of God; in prayer and meditation; in frequent retirement from the world; in communing with our own hearts; in an attendance on the means of grace; it is a melancholy

token that we are yet strangers to the power and influence of religion.

Thus the nature of the duty enjoined in my text briefly implies, that if we wish to ascertain how far we are the real partakers of pure and undefiled religion, we must "Keep the heart with all diligence." We must watch over every secret propensity, every latent solicitation to evil; and from the manner in which vice is encouraged, or opposed in our own bosom, we must learn to estimate our real character and condition. How deeply we are interested in the faithful discharge of this duty, in being only honest to ourselves, must surely be obvious to the most ignorant, and uninformed.—The mistakes we are apt to make through pride, or partiality to our own errors, are the grand hindrances to our security and welfare; the fatal, though hidden means, of temporal and eternal ruin. We start back from every thing that exposes our own guilt and depravity, forgetting that a timely discovery of our spiritual diseases, may hasten a speedy, and an effectual cure. Like one, who is conscious

that his worldly affairs are embarrassed, he avoids the scrutiny of enquiry, when a seasonable investigation might have easily retrieved, what delays render doubly dangerous.

The love of life makes us attentive to the welfare and security of the body, whilst the mind lies neglected like a barren waste, without the culture of wisdom and knowledge. The soul, which is formed to live for ever, either in heaven or hell, ought to be our chief, our unvaried, our principal object of regard. The frail tabernacle of flesh, that contains the jewel, must soon perish and decay; but the mind, vast in its pursuits, and boundless in its wishes, looks forward to eternity! After this vain and precarious life is over, the state of the soul will be fixed, without any possibility of alteration or amendment. Well, then, might the wise man say,—"Keep thy heart with all diligence;" for on the habits and dispositions of mind that prevail in us, we may form a reasonable expectation of our future destiny. We are assured,—"they that are in the flesh cannot please God." And again, "If any man hath not the spirit of Christ, he is

none of his."*—Now what did this spirit consist in?—In unoffending innocence,—in unceasing philanthropy,—in humility, compassion, benevolence, patience, and universal charity.

If then we go on hardened in iniquity, rejecting every admonition, proud, revengeful, avaricious, or unjust, we evince a temper of mind utterly unfit for the pure abodes of beatific spirits. Let us then endeavour, by divine assistance, to keep the heart with all diligence; to study our natural, and constitutional failings; to watch over the prejudices in our minds that obstruct the progress of truth; the passions that ensnare and delude us; the baits that we most eagerly seize or embrace; the errors, both of judgment and of practice, to which we are most constantly liable; and the vulnerable quarters in the citadel of the mind. Confirmed habits of vice are difficult to overcome, but the first beginnings of evil may be checked, (under the auspices of divine grace,) in their fatal career. In fact, it is not merely the principles we imbibe, but the

* Rom. viii. ver. 8, 9.

habits we indulge, that in a great degree determine our true character.

The great duty of keeping the heart, may briefly include our cultivating those dispositions which are good, and thereby obeying the motions of the Holy Spirit; and likewise correcting and opposing those evil propensities to which we are most habitually inclined. This must be done in a constant dependence on divine aid; in a proper use of means towards the attainment of the end; in frequent prayer and meditation; in a life of temperance and sobriety, of faith, and devotedness to God. By the heart, we understand the seat of those affections of the mind, which peculiarly influence and govern the conduct; for if our understandings be ever so well convinced what is right, and we have no inclination to perform it, the effects will be very fruitless, and unavailing. Even the most abandoned among men, when they listen to the dictates of reason, must be persuaded, in a great degree, of their error; but the will, which is the spring of action, is wholly under the power and dominion of lust. "The heart is deceitful above

all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it?"* Instead of exposing, it conceals our errors, and finds a thousand excuses for the worst of crimes. Though it will indulge a criminal severity on the conduct of others, it will always palliate and diminish those faults which are immediately its own. Thus, until the spirit of God tears off the veil that hides us from ourselves, we are unacquainted with our true character.

In order, then, to keep the heart, we must use those means which God hath prescribed in his word. We must institute a strict and impartial enquiry into the prevailing motives of our conduct,—the ruling passions of the mind,—the general bent of our inclination,—and thus maintain a holy jealousy of ourselves. We must place a strict guard on all the avenues of the soul,—on those common inlets to temptation,—on those evil thoughts which intrude even on devotional hours, and disturb our peace.

Keeping the heart, implies a steady determination to do right, and a cautious watchful-

* JERE. xvii. ver. 9.

ness against a levity of disposition, which is uniformly inimical to virtue. "Keep thy heart;" that is, take heed to thy spirit, lest it imbibe the prevailing fashions of a profane and thoughtless world. In discharging this great duty, we must never make light of sin, or trifle with those things which are of unequalled importance. It is sin that divides us from the presence of God,—that is the cause of all our troubles,—and that, which if it be not repented of, will finally plunge us into hell!—Let us, then, in an humble dependence on divine grace to assist us, keep the heart with all diligence.

The duty enjoined in the text, naturally implies a frequent and serious examination of our own hearts, with an attentive regard to whatever passes in our minds, though it be utterly unknown to the world.. With those who wish only to study appearances, or who merely aim at gaining a reputation amongst men, this duty will be tedious and irksome. Nor will the mere formalist in religion be much disposed to commence an enquiry that will detect his follies, or expose his vices. Hence it

is a favourable omen, when any man is inclined to look within, and seriously consider the state of his own mind. It shews at least a wish to do right, whatever be the issue of the enquiry. This important duty cannot be accomplished in the busy crowd, in the tumults of ambition, or in a life of gaiety; but it must be effected with temperance, in retirement, meditation, and prayer. In an honest and impartial enquiry into our own minds, it will be requisite to direct our chief attention to those vices which are constitutional, or predominant; to those temptations which our avocation in life most frequently exposes us to; and to those habits which our worldly interest, or connections, may most readily promote.

The Christian who knows, that to be "carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded, is life and peace,"* will watch over the prevailing tendency of his thoughts, in order to ascertain how far he maintains fellowship and communion with God, as the earnest of future glory. It will be his constant grief

* Rom. viii. ver. 6.

to discover how much his mind is taken up with this present world; and how little, with the interesting realities of futurity! He will trace these dispositions of mind, through all their various progressions, until he discovers the cause of his frequent deviations from the path of wisdom; and ascertains whether these effects arise from education, custom, or example; from the occupation he pursues, the company he keeps, or the opinions he may imbibe. Having discovered the secret cause of his gradual decline in the ways of holiness, he will implore the divine spirit to raise his affections from this transitory world, and to fix them steadily on a better inheritance above. He will say with David, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me,"*

A fond attachment to the world, is a material hindrance to the progress of religion. If we wish, therefore, to keep our hearts with all diligence, we must watch over this fatal and growing propensity. The miser, whose whole thoughts are occupied in the accumula-

* PSALM li. ver. 10.

tion of wealth, cloaths his avarice with the gentler name of a prudent care. The prodigal, who not only wastes his own property, but injures that of others, dignifies his vices with the title of a generous spirit, or of a chearful companion. Thus a love of the world deludes us even into an approbation of our most flagrant vices. To detect these errors, in which we daily impose upon ourselves, is one of the principal duties implied in "keeping the heart."—But in our fallen state, as dead in trespasses and sins, how can we discharge this great, and necessary work of our lives?—Not by a vain confidence in our own ability,—but by looking for aid to that gracious God, who hath promised help in every time of need,—who is the author, and finisher of our faith,—and who worketh in us, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure. He can turn the tide of our affection into a proper channel, and create us anew in Christ Jesus. Hence the Lord hath declared,—"I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: that they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and

they shall be my people, and I will be their God."*

Having shewn the nature of the duty required of us in the text, I proceed now to consider, the reason given for this necessary care. We are enjoined to "keep the heart with all diligence: for out of it are the issues of life." That our conduct, especially in matters of religion, is influenced by the real state of our minds, is too obvious to be denied. If the heart be not right with God, the practice will not be uniform, or sincere. When the pharisees "made the commandment of God of none effect by their tradition," our Lord said, "Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophecy of you, saying, this people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me."†— Thus the fervour of devotion must depend in a great degree on the state of our affections, whether they are devoted to God, or to the world. Whatever relates to our religious conduct, is briefly included under the two distinct heads of Faith, and Practice. It may

* Ezekiel xi. 19, 20. † St. Matthew, xv. 7, 8.

therefore be interesting to enquire, how far they are both governed by the prevailing bent of our inclinations, and affections. That our belief greatly depends on the tempers of the mind, is a fact, avowed by scripture, and confirmed by experience.

Thus men are unbelievers in religion, not because they cannot comprehend truth, but because they do not love it. Their minds are not prepared to receive, or embrace the holy, and humbling doctrines of the gospel, because their pride, and their love of vice, unitedly oppose them. Thus regenerating grace must first change the heart, and alter the bent of our inclinations, before we shall have either a true faith, or a genuine repentance. Why did Nathaniel so readily believe in Christ? Because he was "without guile." He had a love to truth, and was open to conviction. He did not reject the evidence placed before him, and determine not to hear the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely. Prejudice bars up the avenues of the mind, and obstructs the entrance of truth. Like the jaundiced eye, it views every object through a

false medium; and draws conclusions that are partial, erroneous, and unjust. "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."* The fault here is evidently in the affections, and not in the understanding. Men know what is right, but they have no inclination to practise it.

Our wills by nature are averse to holiness, and prone to evil; if, therefore, our hearts be not previously disposed by converting grace to become teachable, humble, and ready to receive truth, however it may condemn our own conduct, we shall make no progress in faith, or virtue. How plainly, then, this accounts for the growth of infidelity. As men grow more wicked, more vitious, and more impatient of all restraint, they become more faithless, and unbelieving. The heart being under the influence of every turbulent and restless passion, it is no wonder that the life is irregular, impious, and immoral. Thus it is evident, that the affections and passions of

† St. John iii. ver. 19.

men, have no small influence on their opinions. As religion, therefore, tends to regulate these tumultuous passions, we can easily imagine why it is so frequently opposed, and so rarely embraced. Our errors arise more from the depraved bias of our affections, than from any immediate defect in our understanding. Our Lord, therefore, told the Jews, "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life;" from which it is evident how far a want of inclination operated in their rejection of truth. Thus, as it is plain that our belief is greatly influenced by our passions; so we ought to keep the heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.

The ruling passion of the mind will not only give a peculiar colouring to our actions, but it will principally determine the nature of our life, and practice. 'The great contest of heaven and earth,' (says the learned Dr. Owen,) 'is about the affections of the poor worm, which we call man. They are all we have to give or bestow. They are not to be bought, nor purchased with riches. So if a man would give to God all the substance of his house,

without love, it would in like manner be despised.'* Were the principles of Christianity uniformly operative on our conduct, we should exhibit reiterated proofs of humility, wisdom, patience, charity, and every grace that can adorn our nature, or dignify our high, and holy calling. But, unhappily, we see the influence of envy and hatred, rancour and bitterness, with other vices, too prevalent amongst those who bear the name of Christians. Hence it appears, that a knowledge of truth, in the theory, will not be alone sufficient to constitute us real Christians; but a renovation of mind, wrought by the agency of the Holy Spirit, subduing our evil passions, and consecrating the temple of our hearts to the one true God. An enlightened head may dwell with an unrenewed heart; it is evident, therefore, that divine grace must first make the change in our affections, in order to produce any lasting effect on the practice.

That we are so frequently precipitated by our passions, into errors which our judgment condemns, has been thus ingeniously accounted

* Owen, on Spiritual Mindedness, p. 178, 179.

for by an able writer.—'First, that we either think not at all of the principles we hold, or permit them to lie dormant; or, if we think of them, we neglect to apply them to our own case; and if we do apply them, we hope to repent at some future period, and to be saved notwithstanding.'* These are the delusions by which we impose on ourselves.

Seeing that true religion is more than the belief of a creed, let us implore the aids of the Holy Spirit, to take our treacherous hearts into his special care and keeping; to direct the prevailing bent of our inclination to a life of holiness; that we may love the duties we practise, and obey from the real dictates of the heart. Then will our virtues be acceptable to God, as the fruits of faith and love. Then shall we delight in the way of God's commandments, be steady in our purposes, and uniform in our practice, anticipating the blissful employment of heaven, and be truly prepared for a state of glory. If these be the constant duties of a Christian, what must become of those who indulge every vitious in-

* Dr. WATERLAND, Vol. I. Sermons, p. 111.

clination, and whose hearts are under the dominion of corrupt passions? Let them tremble lest death should arrest them in a state of mind, so utterly unfit for the purer realms of the heavenly world. Soon will the time arrive, when the objects of our constant choice, of our prevailing inclination, will either add to our happiness, or increase our misery. Let us, therefore, reflect seriously on the preference we make, before our final destiny be irreversibly fixed. Hence, "Keep thy heart with all diligence: for out of it are the issues of life."

SERMON III.

ACTS XXVI. VER. 28.

"Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."

THIS remarkable confession was occasioned by St. Paul's eloquent oration at the bar of Festus and Agrippa, in which he gives an account of his original profession as a pharisee; of his former zeal against the religion which he now embraced; of his miraculous conversion to the faith of Christ; and of the doctrines which he preached unto the gentiles. This great apostle, who was educated at the feet of Gamaliel, and trained to a strict, and steady observance of all the forms of the Jewish law, became now the able advocate of a cause, which he once persecuted, and despised. Truth, which has been often injured by the malice of

its enemies, and the indiscretion of its friends, was here ably defended with impressive eloquence, and convincing argument. A simple appeal to facts, arrested the attention of his hearers. The detail of St. Paul's journey to Damascus, was peculiarly interesting, and affecting. The singular interposition of Providence, which checked him in his career of rage, and turned the tide of his affections into a different channel, was an event of peculiar celebrity, and importance. It shews that God often selects instruments least expected, to accomplish his wise, and unerring purposes. Having finished his striking narrative, St. Paul says,—"King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets?—I know that thou believest.—Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."

These words naturally lead us to enquire,

1st. What are the characteristic qualities of a real Christian.

2d. Wherein it is manifest, that we are only almost, but not altogether persuaded to become one.

3d. The different effects that follow from a temporary conviction of conscience, and a thorough conversion of heart.

The little practical virtue which is too often discovered in those who outwardly profess Christianity, is not owing to any defect in the religion, but to the manner in which it is received, and embraced. The most obvious truths of philosophy will cease to operate on the conduct, if they are only coldly believed, without being cordially loved, and esteemed. The determinations of the judgment will regulate our opinions, but it is the bent of the affections that must influence our practice. The passions of the mind are the great springs that call forth the active display of virtue, and lead us to tread the path, which we previously admire, and approve. Thus when St. Paul preached before Agrippa, his judgment was convinced of the reasonableness of Christianity, and the fulfilment of prophecy; but his affections were not engaged in loving its purity, nor was his heart duly impressed with its importance. Hence it is not enough merely to know what is right, without an inclination to

perform it; and therefore our Lord says,—"If a man love me, he will keep my words."*

A speculative belief of Christianity, is not enough to constitute any man a Christian; for we are assured in the pages of inspiration, that even the devils believe, and tremble. Nor is a merely outward profession of the gospel, a sufficient proof that we are real Christians. We find even a Judas was amidst the twelve apostles. Hence,—"they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: neither because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children."† We may be baptised into a Christian name,—but we must also have a Christian nature. Even an outward attendance on the means of grace, will not alone denominate us Christians, unless we have an inwatd change of heart, with a mind renewed by the power of the Holy Spirit. Let us not rest then only in a form of godliness, or have the house of the mind merely swept and garnished; but let us investigate the state of our affections, and the predominant tendency of our choice, and pursuits. From these we may form an estimate of our

* John xiv. ver. 23. † Rom. ix. ver. 6, 7.

true character, and discover under what habitual influence we act. If we are borne down with the tide of pleasure and dissipation; if we have no reverence for truth, and no serious regard to the positive claims of duty; if we do not aim in all things to glorify God, and to maintain a conscience void of offence; it will only expose our hypocrisy, to profess a religion, which we hourly contradict in our practice.

The characteristic qualities of a real Christian, are an operative faith in the Redeemer, and a genuine repentance for sin; a spiritual mindedness of temper, and disposition; a humble, teachable, benevolent, and forgiving spirit; affections devoted to God, and detached from the world; patience, and resignation to the divine will; universal, and not merely partial obedience; a practice not conformed to the maxims of the world; in all things honest, upright, and sincere; a tenderness of mind ever ready to sympathise with the distressed; and imitating the bright example of our Lord, who "constantly went about doing good."

In delineating the character of a Christian, we must always remember,—he is an altered, but not a perfect man. Whilst he dwells in this vale of tears, he will be yet liable to err, still full of imperfections; but whilst others justify, or encourage the errors they commit, he will be continually lamenting his own on the one hand, and striving against them on the other. There is a wide distinction between falling into error, and securely continuing in it. As we are by nature universally fallen from our primitive innocence, so it is by the power of regenerating grace alone, that we become real Christians. This great work of the Holy Spirit, enlightens the understanding, regulates the affections, directs the choice, and amends the practice. Like a new creation, it brings us from the love of sin, to the love of holiness; and turns us with full purpose of heart unto God, as the supreme object of our adoration, and praise. As every good gift, and every perfect gift cometh from above, so the appropriate qualities of a real Christian are the immediate effects of converting grace. The change which hath passed in the mind of a man who is truly born of the Spirit, is pro-

ductive of new inclinations, new hopes, and a new life. The vices which he once practised, he now abhors; the mistaken confidence which he once placed in his own goodness, is now exchanged for a humble dependence on the righteousness of Christ; and the trifling pursuits which once occupied his time, are now happily renounced for the purer delights of religion, and the more substantial joys of fellowship and communion with God. Again, to constitute a real Christian, we must have a temper, and spirit of mind that is adapted to the nature of our high, and holy calling. Like those who are the followers of the lowly Jesus, we must uniformly evince meekness, humility, forbearance, candour, and benevolence. The Christian will be so humbled under a conviction of his own unworthiness, that he will feel no inclination to triumph over the failings of others, or to boast of his superior virtues; but he will constantly acknowledge,—"By the grace of God, I am what I am." Further, a Christian spirit is loyal, peaceable, and contented; rendering to all their due, honour to whom honour, tribute to whom tribute. It unites men in the bonds of love, and stimulates

them to a faithful discharge of the duties of their respective stations. Thus, "If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his." Let us then beware how we indulge a carnal, a censorious, an envious, a revengeful, or a proud, and haughty spirit. Whilst the true believer will place all his hopes of pardon on the atonement of Christ, he will evidence his faith by his works. He will be found mortifying, instead of indulging, his corrupt appetites; and he will practise self-denial, where the claims of duty, or the interests of religion, may in any degree require it.

I proceed now to consider, wherein it is manifest, that we are only almost, but not altogether persuaded to become Christians. This is evident, when men hesitate between the positive claims of duty, and the defective law of inclination; or in other words, when they retain so much of religion, as gives them a name amongst Christians, without either imbibing its spirit, or obeying its precepts. In this case, the judgment is convinced of the truth of the gospel; but the heart is under the power, and dominion of sin. To become a

real Christian is a great, a glorious, and an important blessing. But to be only divided between religion and the world, between duty and inclination, or to go half way in the Christian race, will prove at last a most fatal delusion, and leave us ultimately far short of the prize. Would it not aggravate the pangs of wretchedness, when our final doom is passed, to know that we have heard of mercy without seeking to obtain it; and that we have been invited to glory, but have only gone part of the way towards enjoying it? Shall we even be solicited to come to the gospel-feast, to the banquet of truth, and only approach the threshold? Let us remember, it is he who endureth unto the end, that shall be saved. Many indeed followed our blessed Lord when he was on earth, for a time,—but quitted his peaceful standard, when troubles, or difficulties occurred. And in the instructive parable of the sower, we read of way-side hearers, who have no root in them, and who wither away under every blast of adversity. These are only almost, but not altogether persuaded to become Christians. They admire the theory of the gospel, and can even dispute in its favour;

but they have never felt its power on the heart, bringing the unruly will, and affections, into conformity, and submission to the will of God. They profess, indeed, the name of Christ,—but in works deny him. It appears also, that we are only almost persuaded to become Christians, when we are wholly devoted to the pleasures of the world, and are strangers to spiritual-mindedness, and internal piety.

"They that are Christ's" (saith the apostle) "have crucified the flesh, with the affections, and lusts."* Instead of living in the criminal indulgence of any known sin, they oppose its first solicitations, and avoid the very appearance of evil. They are only almost Christians, who know nothing of that spiritual warfare, that mighty conflict, which is carried on in the soul; who never feel the burthen, and guilt of sin; and who have not fled in earnest for pardon to the perfect atonement of Christ. Men who are only almost persuaded to become Christians, are formal where they should be fervent; languid, where they ought to be zealous; and attached to the vanities of a trifling

* Galat. v. ver. 24.

world, where they ought to be devoted to sublimer objects. Their virtues do not flow from the generous impulse of gratitude, or from the constraining influence of the love of Christ. Their obedience is partial, instead of universal; so that if they are strict in the discharge of one duty, they are neglectful in the performance of another. Even their devotional spirit is transient and casual, instead of being uniform and steady. There is not even a comparative consistency between their profession, and their practice; but a formality in the one, which does not ameliorate, or influence the other. Many of those who are only almost persuaded to become Christians, begin well in a career of virtue, but do not persevere unto the end. They seem to aim rather at accommodating their duty to their inclination, than to aim at a ready, and chearful performance of all that the duties of their station may require. "No man," (saith our Lord,) "can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God, and Mammon."*

* St. Matt. vi. ver. 24.

As nothing but the grace of God can make us altogether Christians, so we should earnestly implore the aids of the Holy Spirit to renew our hearts, and to direct our affections to the love of truth, and holiness,—to the steady, and abiding practice of every good word, and work.

I proceed now to point out, thirdly, the different effects that follow from a temporary conviction of conscience,—and, a thorough conversion of heart. In a mere conviction of sin, the effects are no longer lasting, than as the object of dread or apprehension is before it, and present to the view. Hence in the hour of sickness, many have made strong vows of amendment, whilst the dread of death was before them; who on recovery, when the object of terror was removed, have unhappily returned to their former evil courses. But in a thorough conversion of heart, or in a being altogether persuaded to become Christians, the bent of the affections is so changed, that our duty is our delight. We become spiritually-minded; and feel a pleasure in the paths of holiness, which none but real Christians know. The vanities of the world no longer

occupy our thoughts, and we have an encreasing fervour in devotion,—an earnest wish to be more fitted for the purer delights of heaven!—Though there will be no perfection, yet there will be a general uniformity in our conduct, if we are altogether Christians: and whatever occurs in our pilgrimage through this vale of tears, it will never be found that we presume to make light of sin!—When men are only almost persuaded to become Christians, they perform outward duties merely to pacify the clamours of conscience, or to blunt the edge of remorse; but when they are the happy partakers of a real conversion of heart, they are not only influenced by a principle of love to God in all their religious duties, but their affections are supremely dedicated to him, amidst their various occupations in the world. They can say with the apostle,—"But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ."*

In short, temporary convictions may induce men to act well through fear, but genuine conversion will be productive of a faith that

* PHILIPPIANS iii. ver. 7.

worketh by love. He who is only almost a Christian, will be anxious only to maintain the appearance of religion; but he who is altogether one, will be in earnest to seek the reality. The one, only wishes for the estimation of men; but the other, for the approbation of God. Hence the apostle, when writing to the Thessalonians, says,—"Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake."*

Permit me then to close this discourse, by warning you against the awful consequences of being only almost, and not altogether persuaded to become Christians. What will it avail you to halt thus between two opinions, if at last you are driven from the presence of God, to dwell in the abodes of misery? When death arrests us, we must be either altogether happy, or altogether miserable, and that to all eternity. Who that were to run a race, would stop short of the prize? If the honours, or the riches of

* I. Thessalo. i. ver. 4, 5.

this world detain you, they will soon vanish from the view. And if you could secure the greatest of worldly enjoyments, they are but of short duration, and cannot be compared to the worth of an immortal soul. Would it not aggravate the wretchedness of your final doom to have been almost in reach of happiness, and to be at last miserable for ever? Beware then how you trifle with religion. Look well to the foundation of your hope, whether it be built on Christ, the rock of ages, or whether you are trusting to a righteousness of your own. Reflect also on the nature and evidences of your faith, whether it be genuine and sincere, or only speculative and vain. At the day of judgment the secrets of all hearts will be laid open, and none but the man who is altogether a Christian, will abide the issue of that trying hour.

Let us then implore the Father of Spirits to implant in our minds the graces of Christianity, —to kindle the fervour of an holy zeal,—to check every immoderate, and unruly passion, —to guide us into all truth,—to animate us in our heavenly course,—to inspire us with a love

of virtue,—to prepare us for a state of holiness: that when we shall have finished our course on earth, we may be ushered into the realms of glory! Thus be "waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

* I. Cor. i. ver. 7, 8.

SERMON IV.

1st. EPISTLE OF ST. PETER, I. V. 9.

"Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls."

IF we appreciate benefits by their duration, and extent, the condition of real Christians will be found supremely glorious, and happy. The trials, or difficulties which they encounter in their journey through life, will be amply compensated in a world, where pleasure shall have no impediment or alloy, and felicity no interruption or end. Hence true believers in Christ should be looking forward to the prize before them, instead of seeking comfort in a sphere too narrow to gratify the wishes of an immortal mind. Were we living more by faith on the promises of God, and with a steady eye to his unerring wisdom, we should not

only glorify the indulgent Author of all our mercies, but we should likewise add to our own comfort, and felicity. The hope of the Christian is not to be shaken by every wind of doctrine; but as it is fixed on Christ, the rock of ages, it is firm, and durable, surviving the wreck of time, and reaching even to eternity!—Animated, therefore, by a view of his high, and holy calling, we find St. Peter in this epistle, from which my text is taken, shewing the Jews who were converted by the power of divine grace, what abundant cause they had to rejoice that God had brought them out of darkness into his marvellous light; that he had enabled them to receive the truth as it is in Jesus; whilst others, through the fatal influence of unbelief, rejected it to their utter destruction.—He further shews, that although for a time they might be in heaviness, through manifold temptations, and meet with afflictions for the trial of their faith; yet, that it would ultimately produce joy unspeakable, and full of glory!—Hence by way of encouragement he adds, in the words of my text,—"Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls."

These words plainly suggest to us,

1st, The worth and value of an immortal soul.

2d. The nature, and end of faith.

3d. The great importance of ascertaining the influence of our faith, on our general conduct, and behaviour.

Amidst the various efforts which have been made to countenance the progress of error, none have been more fatal to the best interests of truth, and virtue, than attempting to reduce the immaterial principle within us, to a level with the brutes that perish. Theories of this seductive nature may flatter our vices, but they cannot appease the clamours of conscience, or drown the recollection of our past actions!—To what purpose was reason, memory, or reflection given us, if we expire with the reptile, without a future state of being? Surely thought, which in a moment wings its way to the remotest region, 'circling the earth's vast globe,' —which travels into futurity, and anticipates

a distant good,—cannot be chained down by organized matter, or be limited to the frail tenement of the body? The mind will be firm in its decisions, and active in its operations; whilst the body is changing through every pore, inert, debilitated, and diseased. Can we measure the expanse of intellect by the ordinary rules of stature, or limit its lofty flights by the narrow space that contains our bodies? Is it even rational to imagine that we entered this world merely to vegetate like the plants, with the mighty grasp of eager expectation, and a longing for immortality?—Even when the body has been proved incapable of its ordinary functions, the mind has been penetrating, acute, intelligent, and wise. And as nothing was ever given us in vain, our reasoning faculties were intended to act in a sphere more enlarged than the present life, where we are continually liable to err, and where our knowledge is at best only in a state of imperfect progression. But we are assured, by the united aid of reason, and revelation, that the soul within us hath all the qualities of an intelligent faculty capable of surviving the body; of being happy or miserable; of incurring a

just responsibility for its voluntary actions, and of retaining a consciousness of its past behaviour!—These are plain truths, which the most unlearned may know,—and which the most ignorant must feel.

The worth, and value of the soul, appears from the extent of its powers; the degree of pleasure, or pain which it is capable of receiving; and the unlimited duration of its being, or existence, either in a state of exquisite bliss, or of unutterable misery. Think of the dangers to which it is exposed; the felicity that it is fitted to enjoy; the end for which it is formed; and the boundless ocean of eternity into which time will speedily conduct it. When millions of ages are past, eternity will have no limit, interruption, or end. Our continual thirst after knowledge, and our anxious solicitude for the future, unitedly evince that the mind was not always intended to move in a sphere so contracted as that which our bodies now occupy. Why then shall we dedicate so much of our time to the care of the body, whilst the soul lies uncultivated like a barren waste? Our chief interest consists in a due preparation for

that state of final retribution to which we are universally hastening. A few years at most will terminate our earthly career. Hence our blessed Lord asks,—"What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"* Nothing that we can attain in this precarious world, will compensate for the loss of heaven. Hence our principal attention should be directed to the real state of our minds; to the nature of our hopes; to the degree of our faith; to the effects of our repentance; and to the leading evidences of that regenerating grace on the heart, without which no one can enter the kingdom of God. The soul will dwell for ever, either in the presence of its Maker in glory,—or with those wretched spirits who are doomed to unutterable woe. Hence its worth and value cannot be estimated by any ordinary rule, unless we put in competition things which are merely temporal, and transient, with those which are unfading, and eternal.

* St. Matt. xvi. 26.

This leads me to consider next, the nature and end of faith.

Having previously admitted that the welfare of the soul is a matter of unequalled importance, we are naturally led to enquire in what way its happiness may be secured, and its preservation accomplished, from the numerous dangers that await it. Had we retained that innocence, in which our first parents were created, the soul would have been the seat of rectitude, and of course supremely happy in fellowship, and communion with God. None of those unruly passions which now disturb our peace, would then have divided us from the only proper object of our adoration, and love. But the soul being now depraved, and vitiated, so that the very imagination of the thoughts of the heart, are only evil continually, we are not only by nature unfit to enjoy the purer delights of heaven, but the carnal mind is actually "enmity with God." It is averse to holiness, and prone to evil; in a state of darkness, sin, and unbelief. Amidst every amiable quality in a virtuous life, and every fatal effect of vice, it prefers the bad, and

rejects the good. This is the true state of the soul since the fall of Adam. Alluding to the fatal apostacy of man, the apostle says,— "There is none righteous, no not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God."* And in another place he thus describes our fallen nature, as "having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God."†

This affecting view of human depravity, is hourly confirmed by facts, and experience. Where can we look, without a striking testimony of this awful truth? And if we seriously reflect on what passes in our own minds, we must be constrained to acknowledge in the language of scripture, that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." As this is the real condition of the natural, or unrenewed mind, it follows, that a change must take place in the bent of our affections, and in the final determinations of our judgment, before we can be disposed for the true enjoyment of spiritual felicity. And as the purity of the divine law cannot be

* Rom. iii. ver. 10, 11. † Ephe. iv. ver. 18.

transgressed with impunity, so a deliverance from the curse of that holy law, which we have universally broken, can only be obtained thro' faith in the compleat, and finished redemption of Christ. When our blessed Lord entered this vale of tears, it was not merely to exhibit a pattern of virtue, and to die in order to confirm the truth of his precepts. But it was, happily for us, a far more extensive undertaking. He came to ransom us by the price of his own blood,—to fulfil every claim of the law as our great surety,—to bring in an everlasting righteousness,—to magnify the law, and make it honourable,—to secure us a title to glory; that where he is, we might assuredly be also!—Christ is the author, and the finisher of our redemption; the alpha, and omega; the first, and the last, in the great work of our recovery from final perdition! It is on him alone, therefore, that our hopes must be fixed, as the rock of ages.

Hence the blessings of redemption are conveyed to us through the medium of faith. It is by believing, that we make them our own. This may be briefly explained by the analogy

of a sick man; for sin is the most fatal disease that ever infected the human race. When we are convinced of the fatal malady that lurks in our frame, and destroys our peace, we no sooner hear of a remedy, of an effectual cure, than we apply it to our own case, and are healed. Thus faith is a cordial reliance on Christ, as our only redeemer, and the end of it is, (in the language of my text,) "Even the salvation of your souls." It is the instrument whereby we lay hold on the blessings of the gospel, and fly to a crucified Redeemer, as the only refuge for the guilty.

The nature of this faith is best described, "as the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen." It realizes a distant good, as though we were in the actual enjoyment of it; and thereby glorifies God, by a firm reliance on his promises. Whereas unbelief is an insult on the divine veracity, and a tacit rejection of the benefits that are offered us. Faith, as well as repentance, is the gift of God, and is implanted in the heart by the power of the Holy Spirit. Like other Christian graces, it hath its degrees,—its periods of

growth, or decline,—and its various effects. A merely speculative faith, will amuse the taste, without improving the life. But the faith to which the apostle refers, in my text, will uniformly influence the practice, and render us honest, diligent, and sober in every station that we fill; leading us to abound in every good word, and work. The generous impulse of gratitude will constrain us to live holy, to adorn our profession of the gospel, and to unite the two characteristic qualities of a real Christian—Simplicity, and Godly-sincerity.

Thus we see, that every true believer in Christ is daily receiving the salvation of his soul, as the end of his faith. He is looking forward amidst every temporal affliction, to the prize which shall be awarded to him at the close of his Christian race. Hence, amidst all the unavailing solicitudes on earth, his portion is in heaven. There he looks, with the eye of faith, to mansions in the skies; where he shall be free from a body of sin, and death, and dwell for ever with the Lord. Hence St. Peter encourages those who were converted among

the Jews, not to be depressed under the idea of their worldly losses, and afflictions, from the consideration of what they were receiving, even the salvation of their souls.—Did this animating thought operate more frequently on our minds, how happy would be the life of a real Christian, even in this sphere of trouble. If our souls be redeemed by the precious blood of the Lamb, our chief want is supplied. By seeking first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, all other things shall be added unto you.

I shall now close my discourse, by considering the great importance of ascertaining the influence of our faith, on our general conduct, and behaviour.

Though perfection cannot be found in any man, and numerous imperfections tarnish the lustre of the brightest characters; yet if our faith does not amend our conduct, it may be the belief of the head, but it cannot be the principle of the heart. They who are Christ's in reality, must crucify the flesh, with the affections, and lusts. Instead of yielding implicitly

to our depraved passions, we must mortify, and oppose them; be found striving against sin; and avoid even the very appearance of evil. Does our faith make us more holy, more humble, and more devoted to God in all things? then it produces the fruits that properly belong to it. But if it leave us vain, trifling, and worldly-minded like others; if we can make light of sin, and live in the habitual allowance of any known vice; then we have abundant reason to suspect the nature, and the degree of our faith.

Happy then is the man, whose faith produces those useful effects which are visible to all around him; whose professions lead to a conscientious practice, to a scrupulous integrity, to an uniform course of virtue. Awful, then, on the other hand, is the condition of those unbelievers, who glory in their shame, and who live without God in the world. Let them reflect seriously on the precariousness of life, and on the danger of neglecting this great salvation. Let them consider the awful consequences of dying in sin, and of refusing the glorious invitations of the gospel.—If then we

have that faith which ends in the salvation of the soul, we shall have the pleasing anticipation of future glory,—the spiritual consolations of fellowship, and communion with God!—"Let not sin, therefore, reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God."*

* Rom. vi. ver. 12, 13.

SERMON V.

PSALM CXIX. VER. 113.

"*I hate vain thoughts: but thy law do I love.*"

A Steady attention to the real state of our own minds, is one of the most interesting pursuits in which we can possibly be engaged. On a due investigation of this important point, we are enabled to ascertain our progress, or decline in the paths of virtue; our improvements in knowledge; our advancement in piety; or our gradual deviation from the unerring rules of truth and wisdom. The mind is the true standard of the man. Here it is that we must look for the energy of thought, the impulse of affection, or the guidance of integrity. Here it is, that the motives which govern our whole deportment lie concealed.

In this busy retreat of intellect, we are naked, and open to the omniscient eye of that almighty Being with whom we have to do; and to whose final scrutiny we must soon be accountable. Thought, the swift emissary of the mind, keeps up an intercourse with even distant worlds; surveys the planetary orbs; traverses the boundless ocean; penetrates to the remotest regions; and even wings its way to the abode of beatific spirits!—Thus, in watching the progress of these capacious powers, which are the ennobling gifts of heaven, we see whither the full tide of affection is likely to direct us in our earthly career, in our journey from time to eternity!—In an enquiry so awful, trifling would be madness, —and levity, ruin. Impressed with a thorough persuasion how much depends on a serious regard to the prevailing bias of the mind, we find David exclaiming, in the words of my text,—"I hate vain thoughts: but thy law do I love."

These words suggest to us,

1st. The duty of guarding against the earliest propensity to evil.

2d. The proofs of human depravity in the mind.

3d. The real delight of a good man; "thy law do I love."

It is by various, and unperceived gradations, that we are led on to commit errors, which at one time we should have viewed with dread and abhorrence. But by a long course of evil habits, we become at length familiarized to practices which are not only odious in their nature, but ruinous in their effects.

So numerous are the avenues to the mind, and so specious are the objects that ensnare us, that it forms a principal part of our duty, and interest through life, to watch over the predominant bias, and tendency of our choice. Many things which have arrogated the names of a refined, or of a liberal taste, are only the flimsy coverings of vice, and an apology for the errors we are daily committing. To whatever quarter our supreme, and fixed attention is directed, we ought to be well aware that our object is good, our motives virtuous, our aims honest,

and our end laudable. "Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth."* Where the mind is eagerly bent on the attainment of a distant object, it would often be the path of wisdom to suspend the fervour of our zeal for a moment, and to consider how far we are right. Our passions precipitate us into many errors, which a little previous consideration might have frequently prevented. Hence it becomes the duty of every man who is sincere in his profession of religion, and who is awakened from the lethargy of vice, to guard against the earliest propensity to evil. Let us pause at the beginning, before confirmed habits, and long usage, shall have rendered our recovery more difficult to accomplish. Though the spirit of God can alone regenerate the heart, and subdue the corrupt inclinations of our fallen nature; yet we may resist the motions, and quench the influence of that blessed Spirit, by our own wilful continuance in sin. We may be unhappily given up to a hardened and reprobate mind, if we slight the invitations of the gospel, and wholly neglect the state of our own souls. We

* Rom. xiv. ver. 22.

may indeed be outwardly prosperous as to riches, and honours, but this will avail us little, if our hearts be not right with God.

One of the most effectual methods, therefore, to ascertain our progress in holiness, and to guard against the earliest propensity to evil, is to watch over the predominant tendency of our thoughts. The worldly-minded, and covetous, will have their attention chiefly taken up with the pursuits of gain, and how they are to increase, and accumulate wealth. The gay, and dissipated, will have the principal bent of their thoughts directed to amusement and pleasure; to find out how they may waste time, and trifle with those irrecoverable moments which they can never recall. The lascivious, and abandoned, will have the principal current of their thoughts flowing in the channels of impurity, seduction and vice. They will be probably plotting the ruin, and aiming at the seduction of the virtuous and unsuspecting. But as to the real Christian, his prevailing thought will be directed to know how he may obtain the favour of God, a growth in grace, and a meetness for the

kingdom of glory. He will be thinking in what way a sinner may escape from the wrath to come, through faith in the atonement of Christ: how the attributes of justice, and mercy, are mutually extolled, in the finished work of our redemption. His thoughts will be frequently employed in meditating on the freeness of divine grace, on the wonders of redeeming love, and on the glory of that illustrious plan of mercy which announces pardon and forgiveness to all who are only willing to embrace it. Though it be highly probable that no man can absolutely controul his thoughts, yet when bad ones are suggested to the mind, we can either encourage, or oppose them. In avoiding many things that are evil, our power is probably greater than our inclination. Hence it is evident, that by giving way to trifling, and often vitious thoughts, we fan the latent spark of evil into a flame, and promote irregular inclinations in the mind, which it is no less our interest than it is our duty, to endeavour to suppress. This plainly shews the importance of shunning all profane, and loose company, which is too apt to ensnare even the wisest,—to lessen our reverence

for virtue,—to familiarize the mind to evil,—to make light of sin,—and to hurry us into actual enormities, before we are aware of our danger. Hence the truth of the well-known maxim, that "Evil communications corrupt good manners." The thoughts we habitually indulge, are indications in a great degree of the real state of our minds, and shew how far we are engaged in attending to the objects they propose. And how dangerous it is only to listen to the suggestions of vice, let daily experience testify.

When we begin by readily admitting those thoughts which are either impious, or immoral, we are in danger of committing the errors which we thus secretly indulge. For though the actions of our life be open to the view of others, it is the mind that previously arranges, and determines, what we ultimately execute, and perform. If, therefore, we are honest, or upright in our intentions of avoiding evil, we must oppose its earliest progress in our thoughts. The voice of temptation would not be complied with, if it were not first attended to. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from

you,"* is the advice of an inspired apostle. But if we go to the very borders of iniquity, and under the idea of innocent recreations tread as as it were on the very heels of vice, we must expect to be ensnared by our own folly. Instead of a presuming confidence, therefore, in our own strength, or wisdom, let us be humble, watchful, and dependent, looking for continual supplies of grace to keep us securely to the end.

As true religion is seated in the heart, it must have a powerful influence on our thoughts. Hence every converted man will readily adopt the language of David, and say, "I hate vain thoughts:"—he will dread the first beginnings of sin, and be afraid of his own deceitful heart. And though David could not say he was free from vain thoughts, which intrude on the most exemplary among men, yet he could affirm that he hated them, that he did not encourage or entertain them, but used every mean in his power to counteract their baneful influence. Every true believer will adopt the language of the apostle and confess,—"For I know that in

* St. James iv. ver. 7.

me, (that is in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good, I find not. For the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do."*

There is a struggle, a conflict, a spiritual warfare in the breast of every regenerate Christian. But worldly men are so far from feeling any inclination to oppose their corrupt propensities, that they are studying every opportunity to pamper, and indulge them. Vain thoughts not only divert the mind from that which is good, but they open a door to every evil work, and dispose us by degrees to the perpetration of the most atrocious crimes. Hence the prophet exclaims,—"O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved: how long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?"† A trifling spirit, that never thinks deeply, or steadily about any thing, is one of the greatest hindrances to the progress of religion. These frivolous dispositions are rarely impressed by the most alarming truths,

* Rom. vii. 18, 19. † Jere. iv. 14.

and are scarcely aware of their danger until it actually overtakes them.

This plainly shews, that our thoughts ought to be employed chiefly on those objects which are most worthy of our fixed regard; and that we should frequently consider the important things which belong to our peace, before they are for ever hid from our eyes. Why do we bestow so much of our thoughts, and attention, on a world, which we must soon leave; and think so little of eternity? Why are our minds occupied with such unavailing cares, when the great interests of the soul are forgotten? Let us then reflect what kind of thoughts find the easiest admission into our minds; in what manner they generally make their approach; and on what occasions they are usually introduced. These enquiries may lead, under the auspices of divine grace, to the most useful discoveries, in which we may be able to ascertain the vulnerable quarters in our own mind, and the temptations to which we are most immediately exposed. A well-known writer says, 'A man that hath so numerous, and turbulent a family to govern as his own thoughts, which are too

apt to be at the command of his passions, and appetites, ought not to be long from home.'

Thus we should watch against all fretful, and discontented thoughts,—against those which are too anxious, and apprehensive,—against angry, or revengeful thoughts,—against every thing trifling, and visionary, or too gloomy, and desponding, profane, or immoral. By frequent prayer, and serious meditation on the word of God, our thoughts may, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, be directed to the contemplation of those objects which are most worthy our supreme regard. For "the thoughts of the righteous are right"*—but "the thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord."†

This leads me to consider, briefly, the proofs of human depravity in the mind.

Notwithstanding the flattering theories of modern philosophers on the dignity of human nature, and the boasted discoveries of reason; we find, on an appeal to fact, and experience,

* Prov. xii. ver. v. † Prov. xv. ver. 26.

that we are universally participants of a fallen, and depraved nature. The proper restraints of law, and the culture of education, tacitly evince this awful, but incontrovertible truth. But a due attention to what is continually passing in our own mind, under all the advantages of refinement, and knowledge, will speedily evince the depravation of our noblest powers. The acuteness of intellect is not only destroyed, or lessened by prejudice, and an enmity to truth, but our affections are fatally withdrawn from God, the author of all our mercies!—Our blessed Lord traces this evil to its source, and accounts at once for every effect that follows:—"Out of the heart," saith our divine Teacher, "proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies."* The fountain being corrupt, the streams which flow from thence cannot be pure. The heart being so utterly depraved, our vain, and vitious thoughts are amongst the consequences that follow from our original depravity. Before the mind, then, can be properly disposed to pure and undefiled religion,—to heavenly, and spiritual thoughts,—to a love

* St. Matt. xv. 19.

of God, and obedience to his precepts; it must be created anew in Christ Jesus,—changed in the bias of its affections,—enlightened in the faculties of discernment,—and be more conformed to the image, and likeness of God. Thus the evil thoughts we are apt to indulge, are proofs, amongst many others, of the depravity of the mind; and plainly evince, that regenerating grace alone can create a clean heart, or renew a right spirit within us.

Hence we see, thirdly, the real delight of a good man, exemplified in the words of my text, where David says,—"but thy law do I love."—This is the happy change produced by the power of converting grace. Our duty becomes our pleasure. David admired, and loved the strictness of that holy law, which forbad all vain thoughts, and sinful inclinations. Like a traveller hastening to his journey's end, he wished to be fitted in the state of his mind, for the company of blessed spirits, where nothing unholy will gain admittance. And if we are the real partakers of genuine piety, our religious duties will form our chief pleasure on earth. Our affections, which have been for-

merly dedicated to unworthy objects, will now be engaged in the animating pursuits of holiness, and be receiving the earnest of future glory.

From what hath been observed we learn, that religion not only enlightens our understanding to discover the truth as it is in Jesus, but it also regulates our affections, directs our choice, and even governs our thoughts. As the Christian is preparing for spiritual enjoyments, for intellectual pleasures; so much of his present comfort and peace, depends on the state of his mind. His thoughts being frequently employed on spiritual objects, it will add to the energy of his faith, increase the fervour of his hopes, stimulate him to every good word and work, prepare him to endure affliction, inspire him with a just contempt of the world, fit him to meet the approach of death, and to enter on an untried eternity! Whereas those mistaken and deluded mortals, whose thoughts have never been truly fixed on God, will be overcome by every disappointment they meet with, and surprized, but not prepared, for the arrival of death and judgment. How

awful, then, is the condition of those, whose thoughts are wholly employed in the purposes of evil, and in filling up the measure of their iniquity: who live without hope, and without God in the world. Let them remember, the day is hastening, when "every secret thing shall be brought into judgment, whether it be good, or evil. Who then can abide the day of his coming," when he will take vengeance on them who obey not his gospel?

Let it then be our supreme felicity on earth, to have our thoughts employed on the purity of heaven, on the perfection of holiness, on the wonders of redeeming love, even whilst we are engaged in our various avocations here; that our hearts may be fixed on the attainment of blessings which are unfading, and eternal! —Thus in our pilgrimage through this vale of tears, let us act as those who must soon be accountable to God,—"For the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts. If thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever."*

* I. CHRON. xxviii. ver. 9.

SERMON VI.

ST. MATTHEW, I. PART OF VER. 25.

——"*And he called his name Jesus.*"*

IT appears from the testimony of profane history, and even from the most distant records of antiquity, that the ancient philosophers were in constant expectation of an extraordinary Person, who should come from God to instruct, and reform mankind. They confessed, in all the plenitude of wisdom, what our modern philosophers affect to deny, that the light of nature, or of unassisted reason, is insufficient to direct men into all truth; and that a revelation from God was absolutely wanting. Socrates says,—"Ye may even give over all hopes of amending mens' manners for the future, unless God be pleased to send

* On Christmas Day.

you some other person to instruct you." And Plato says, "Whatever is set right, and as it should be, in the present evil state of the world, can be so only by the particular interposition of God." And Porphyry, who lived after our Saviour's time, and who had a most inveterate hatred to the Christian revelation in particular, yet confesses he was convinced there was wanting some universal method of delivering men's souls, which no philosophy had yet found out. —Now if many of the acutest observations which are made by our modern Deists, are absolutely borrowed from the revelation, which they refuse to embrace, it is plain they could never have advanced these things without it. 'What ground,' says one, 'have any modern Deists to imagine that if they had lived without the light of the gospel, they should have been wiser than Socrates, Plato, or Cicero?"* —The arguments which are borrowed now from the super-added light of revelation, ought not to be employed as weapons in wounding the injured claims of truth. What we call reason in modern ages, is improved by revelation, and owes its best discoveries to the records

* Dr. Clark, p. 375.

of inspiration. The Jews, who were originally the chosen people of God, were many of them endowed with the gift of prophecy, and were thus enabled, by a power from above, to foretel events which have been since literally accomplished. Being thus prepared by the different gradations of knowledge for the meridian of truth, and wisdom, the Sun of Righteousness at length arose, with healing on his wings, and discovered the light of life, and immortality, in all the radiance of a Gospel-day.—Thus, in the fulness of time, the promised Redeemer came; was born, in strict conformity to every prediction, of a pure virgin; and Joseph, in consequence of the direction given him by the angel of the Lord,—"called his name Jesus."

For our further edification, I shall consider,

1st. The great benefits we derive from the birth, and incarnation of our blessed Lord.

2d. What we are to understand by his name being called Jesus.

3d. The improvement we ought to make of this glorious, and unparalleled event.

If we confess that he who created the world, can govern it by whatever laws he thinks fit; that as he formed the universe out of a confused chaos, so he can easily suspend, or alter the ordinary course of nature, to accomplish his wise and unerring purposes: we must acknowledge that mysteries, however incomprehensible to us, cannot be rationally denied, when the defect is not in the mystery, but in our faculties of knowledge. The eye cannot trace objects to the utmost distance, because the mediums of vision are limited; yet we do not conclude that remote objects have no existence, because we are incapable of seeing them. There are distinct provinces allotted to faith, and reason; and many things which cannot be within the reach of the latter, are no less the positive duty of the former. Thus by the obedience of faith we glorify God; we acknowledge the veracity of his divine word; and evince that we are duly apprized of the proper degree and extent of those powers, which infinite wisdom and goodness hath con-

ferred on us, not to dispute the will of God, but to reverence and obey it. Mysteries are of two kinds. The one includes those things which never would have been known without a revelation; and yet, when revealed, are in a great degree understood:—the other relates to those, which, when revealed, we know the reality of their existence as facts; but cannot comprehend the manner, or mode of their existence. Of this latter kind, is the incarnation of Christ; or the union of the divine and human nature in one person. The preternatural, and extraordinary manner in which our blessed Lord visited this lower earth, was calculated to answer the most glorious and important purposes to us. He was born of a virgin, that human nature might be found again in its primitive purity, and free from the contagion of original sin, which is now transmitted to the whole race, and posterity of Adam. In this state of spotless innocence, our Lord became a perfect model of virtue; and could make a full, and ample atonement for sin. Having no offence of his own, he could expiate the crimes of others, and thus bring in an everlasting righteousness. Here the character of Christ

strictly corresponded with the types under the Jewish law, of a lamb without spot, and blemish. The wonderful union of the divine and human nature, in the incarnation and birth of Christ, is an ample ground of consolation to believers. For though it were necessary that he should become man to endure the punishment which our offences had justly incurred; yet the divinity of his godhead was no less requisite, to give efficacy to the great, and mighty work of our redemption. Thus he, who was rich, as God, from all eternity, became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich. He quitted the realms of glory, and the abodes of unceasing bliss, to tread this vale of tears; to take on him our nature in all things, sin only excepted; to obey every demand of a perfect law; and to redeem us from the curse due to our transgressions.

The manner in which the birth of Christ took place, was not only an unparalleled display of love to a guilty world, but also a striking instance of humility. Instead of rending the heavens by the word of his power, and coming attended by a legion of angels, in

flaming chariots of fire; he came as the meek and lowly Jesus,—was born under the roof of obscurity,—was laid in a manger, because there was no room for him even at an inn. Thus did the Lord of Life and Glory come on his errand of love, under every outward mark of poverty, and meanness, with scarcely a place allowed him where to recline his infant head. The Jews expected an earthly conqueror; but he came to accomplish a victory over sin, and death, to destroy the power of the grave, and to open the gates of everlasting bliss. Well might Isaiah thus propecy of him,—"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace!"*—Amidst the numerous benefits that we derive from the birth, and incarnation of Christ, we may include the completion of our hopes, and the security of our future expectations.

Christ, as God, gave an infinite dignity and value to all that he undertook: and, as man,

* Isaiah, ix. 6.

he endured the weight of divine wrath in our stead; obeyed the law to the utmost extent of its demands; left a perfect example of virtue for our imitation; and finished the glorious work which he purposed in our behalf. Happily for us, Christ took not on him the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham; that, being tempted, like as we are, yet without sin, he might be able to succour also them that are tempted. He knows the infirmities to which we are liable, the difficulties we have to encounter; and he takes compassion on the ignorant, or them who are out of the way. We also derive the benefit of Christ's mediatorial office, from his incarnation and birth. The apostle says,—"There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."* And if any man "sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."† He will plead the merit of his own obedience in behalf of believers, and present them faultless to the throne of God. Indeed the very office of a mediator implies, that our sins have placed us at an awful distance from God, and therefore our incarnate

* I. Tim. ii. 5. † I. John, ii. 1.

Lord is the only mean of reconciliation and forgiveness. He is perfectly qualified for this great, and arduous undertaking, from the union of the divine and human nature, as God and man. Thus, "such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; who needeth not daily as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the peoples': for this he did once, when he offered up himself."* Again,—the perfect holiness of Christ's human nature, is imputed unto us by faith, as a part of his righteousness, and as an earnest of our future meetness for the kingdom of glory. "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the godhead bodily: and ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power."†

Thus having shewn the great benefits we derive from the birth and incarnation of our blessed Lord, I proceed to consider next, what we are to understand by his name being called Jesus."

* Heb. vii. 26, 27. † Colos. ii. 9, 10.

That this name was applied with singular propriety to our blessed Lord, will appear obvious when we reflect on the important errand which he visited this earth, to effectuate and accomplish. The name "Jesus," implies a saviour, or deliverer, and consequently it is peculiarly descriptive of one who has the power of rescuing us from any impending evil; and of bringing us into a state of security and happiness. Indeed it pre-supposes one, who has extraordinary might, and wisdom, power, and pre-eminence, majesty, and authority, to compleat a work of uncommon magnitude, and importance. One, on whom the fate of empires, and of men, stands suspended; and whose stupendous work must involve in it the greatest concatenation of events, that ever the universe beheld!—Here the mighty struggle was to determine, nothing less than the destiny of the world!—We may paint to our view all the legions of fallen spirits, doomed to live in the regions of woe, seeking the irretrievable ruin of guilty man. Stung with envy, and impelled by malice, they tempted our first parents to quit the peaceful abodes of Paradise, through the baneful influence of murmuring

and discontent. Wishing to become as gods, and to be greater than infinite wisdom saw fit, they forfeited the bliss of Paradise, with their pristine rectitude, and innocence. They ceased to be happy, when they ceased to obey. Whilst the will of God was their supreme delight, no intruding cares, no agonizing pains, no mortifying disappointments, embittered the cup of life. Their wants were few, their pleasures boundless, their triumphs wisdom, and their joys divine. But when the fatal influence of sin levelled its envenomed shafts, and spread accumulated horrors through this lower sphere, —a dismal reverse ensued. Truth, integrity, and virtue, the bonds of mutual confidence, were at once dissolved; and jealousy, suspicion, or distrust, became the fiends of social intercourse, the bane of all rational, or permanent enjoyment. The mind of man, once the throne of innocence, the empire of wisdom,—became the polluted seat of lust, rage, envy, and every corrupt propensity.

Thus fallen in Adam, the federal head of mankind, we became the participants of a depraved nature, liable to the curse of a broken law, and exposed to all the horrors of future

punishment. "As by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin,—and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."* In this condition, we universally stood in need of a Deliverer, to pay the debt which our transgressions had incurred,—to atone for our violation of the divine law,—and to give us a title to the realms of glory.—In the fulness of time this endearing Character appeared on earth,—in the habiliments of a mortal form,—the beauty of holiness,—the perfection of innocence,—the Incarnate God.—And that we may thoroughly understand the nature of his mission, we find after his birth, that Joseph—"called his name Jesus." Now what propriety could there have been in this name, if our Lord had only been a pattern of moral virtue? The idea of a Saviour implies previous danger, and shews that our condition as offenders against God, is awful, and alarming!—The reason given for this name is thus recorded by the evangelist St. Matthew,—"For he shall save his people from their sins;"—not the nation of the Jews only, for they rejected his mission; but all, of every rank and degree, who come unto him

* Rom. v. 12.

by faith: who, renouncing every other dependence, are willing to receive pardon, and forgiveness, as an act of free, unmerited mercy. Well may we rejoice this day, at the birth of Christ, since he hath opened to us guilty offenders a way of being finally happy, of escaping the wrath to come, and of dwelling for ever with the Lord. This is "the only name given under heaven, among men, whereby we can be saved." If we reject this offer of salvation through Christ alone, we must abide the tremendous issue.

But we ought further to remark, that Jesus came to save, or deliver his people from their sins; not only from the punishment due to them, but also from their prevalence, and dominion. He came to pay a ransom to deliver us from the penalty of a broken law, and hath now promised us the aids of his Holy Spirit, to subdue our corrupt affections, to regulate our passions, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works. He came not to destroy, but to fulfil the law; not to relax the bonds of moral obligation, but to strengthen, and increase them. A true faith in

Jesus, will inspire us with a love of virtue, with an uniform wish to glorify God, and with a strict regard to the precepts of morality. They who pervert, or abuse the doctrines of Christianity, evince to whom they belong; for no faith can be genuine, or sincere, unless it be accompanied by the fruits of holiness. Christ hath also given us an example of virtue which we ought to imitate, for if we know these things, happy are we if we do them; but not if we neglect them.

I shall now close my discourse, by briefly considering the improvement we ought to make of the unparalleled event, which we this day professedly commemorate.

First, then, we should seriously enquire, whether we who now rejoice at the birth of Christ, have ever relied on his atonement, implored his spirit, or studied his example. Perhaps a high opinion of our own worthiness, or a spirit of scepticism and infidelity, have kept us from embracing this free salvation. If either of these principles have operated on our minds, let us earnestly pray for converting grace,

that we may see the error of our ways, before our doom be unalterably fixed. But if, on the other hand, we are the real followers of Jesus, let us manifest the superior excellence of our holy religion, in all godliness and honesty, in a course of well-doing, and in endeavouring to maintain a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward man. Let us also improve the event of our Lord's birth, in a manner becoming Christians; not by drunkenness, and intemperance; not by a practice of which even heathens would be ashamed;—but by a rational emanation of joy, a spirit of prayer and praise, and a god-like temper of charity, and compassion to the poor.—In commemorating this great festival of our church, let us look forward to the future coming of Christ; when he who was laid in a manger, will appear in all his glorious majesty, to judge the quick and dead. Let us then be prepared to meet him at his coming, that he may address each of us saying,—"Well done thou good, and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

SERMON VII.

ST. LUKE, XXIII, PART OF VER. 34.

*"Then said Jesus,—Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."**

THE crucifixion, and death of Christ, is not only an unparalleled display of the love of God to man, but also an awful demonstration of the guilt and turpitude of our crimes. When our first parents had forfeited the bliss of Paradise, by their voluntary transgressions, and moral evil made its tragic entrance into our world, the triumphs of innocence yielded to the increasing torrent of accumulated woes. The still retreats of virtue were disturbed by the tumults of envy, the dictates of pride, or the emanation of disgust. He, who once walked amidst the trees of the garden, with conscious innocence, now fled from the pre-

* On Good Friday.

sence of his Maker, under the painful recollection of offence. All nature wore a different aspect; and he, who was formed to enjoy the most exquisite delights, became a miserable fugitive, doomed to the vicissitudes of a changing scene, to the horrors of disease, and ultimately to death. So unalterable are the laws of justice, so inflexible are the claims of truth, that the wilful deviation of our first parents from the moderate requirements of infinite wisdom, and goodness, could not escape unpunished. Offerings were demanded from fallen man as an acknowledgment of his guilt, and as a faint reference to that grand expiatory atonement, which was finally accomplished in the meridian day of the gospel. Here Christianity, as old as the creation, has only been the gradual developement of one glorious scheme of mercy; or, like the acorn, which contains the seminal parts of a stately tree, at length spreading itself into the dignity and majesty of the oak, whose leaves shade us from the heat, or shelter us from the storm.

After the types of the Jewish law yielded to the great antitype, Christ Jesus, and the lan-

guage of prophecy was on the eve of its grand completion, in the fulness of time, our blessed Lord entered this vale of tears, and came into this lower world under the humble roof of poverty and meanness. Though he had legions of angels at his command, and the very heavens were formed by the word of his power; yet, as he came on an errand of love, he trod the path of humility; and was even at his birth, and incarnation, laid in a manger, because there was no room for him in the inn. What a lesson of contentment and resignation is this, to aspiring mortals, who repine at their lot, who are disgusted by every little disappointment, when they reflect that the Redeemer of mankind was enthroned in the menial limits of a stable, and placed in his infant state as a companion with the brutes!—When he entered on his career of mercy, no efforts of malice, no local prejudices could impede his godlike pursuit of "doing good." Perfect innocence, unoffending virtue, and unerring wisdom, were the uniform and invariable traits of his whole deportment. His retinue was the diseased, the blind, the lame, the wretched, and the unfortunate victims of human woe.

No intreaties passed unheard; and even those who so eagerly wished to destroy him, were the sharers of his bounty. Instead of fanning the flame of discord, he chearfully submitted to all lawful authority, thereby giving us an example, that we should walk in his steps. His life was a perfect pattern of beneficence, and every moral virtue; his precepts were holy, just, and good; and his doctrines were plain, pure, artless, simplified, and excellent. They inculcated universal obedience, and the absolute need of a change of heart; of spiritual affections, and holy inclinations, to prepare us for the happiness of the heavenly world. They were strict, because they were sincere; they were contrary to the maxims of a trifling world, because they came from heaven. His golden precept of doing unto others what we would they should do unto us, will form an eternal rule of moral obligation. To move the stubborn prejudice of unbelief, and establish the empire of virtue in the heart of man, he made the very elements obedient to his will. The stormy winds were calm at his command, and even the raging seas obeyed his voice. Even the dead quitted the dreary tomb

at his unerring mandate, and rose to confirm the truth of his mission. But after this unequalled triumph of beneficence, the very man who sat at his table, who heard his heavenly precepts, and who beheld his spotless innocence, betrayed him into the hands of his enemies. Why, then, are we so mortified at the deceitfulness of human friendships, when we reflect that a Judas was even one of the twelve?—This lamb, without spot, or blemish, was dragged before Pilate, falsely accused, buffeted, mocked, and crowned—with a crown of thorns. At length, the holy, and immaculate Jesus, was condemned to die!—He, who went about constantly doing good, was now crucified between two thieves, as a common malefactor. His precious body was torn by the wounding nail! And those arms, which were constantly extended for the relief of others, were now tortured on the accursed tree!—Yet, in the midst of these base requitals of ungrateful man, behold, the blessed Jesus said,—"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!"

The obvious enquiry suggested by these words is,

1st, To consider the nature of the petition in the text.

2d. To attend to the plea here adopted.

3d. To conclude with some practical inferences from the whole.

The mild, and benevolent genius of the Christian religion, is most strikingly displayed in the patience, and compassion which is here exemplified in its divine Founder. Though his life had been one undeviating course of beneficence, and though he was doomed to the painful, and ignominious death of the cross, by men whose redemption he came to secure; yet we find him praying for them, even whilst he hung suspended on the accursed tree!—Even, whilst they were nailing his precious body to the cross, it is understood, that our Lord uttered this affecting prayer,—"Father, forgive them!"—The sin they were guilty of, might have justly incurred the denunciation of woe, because they were actually crucifying one, who was perfectly innocent, holy, harmless, and undefiled. But instead of hurling

vengeance on these unbelieving Jews, he made them the peculiar objects of his prayer. He interceded for transgressors, according to the prophecy of Isaiah, who says,—"He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."* In these words of Christ upon the cross, we have a clear display of his mediatorial office, and of the true intent and meaning of his death. "Father, forgive them!" not only these, but all who shall repent, and believe the gospel.

Thus the grand, and important end proposed by the death of Christ, was to procure for us the forgiveness of sin. Though he hath left us an example of virtue, which we are bound to imitate to the utmost of our power; yet the great end of his crucifixion and death, was not merely confined to this. The apostle informs us,—"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."† And our Lord assures us, that "he came to seek and to save them that were lost." This was the great, and glorious errand, on which he came

* Isaiah, liii. 12. † I. Tim. i. 15.

into this vale of tears, that by his active, and passive obedience, he might fulfil the claims of a holy law, and bring in an everlasting righteousness. From the compleat atonement which Christ hath finished on the cross, we derive a title to glory, a ground of hope, and a sure way of access to the realms of joy. Sin, the grand parent of human woe, the barrier that divides us from our almighty friend, the cause of all our anxious cares, and corroding griefs, is here forgiven through a Redeemer's blood. Hence the apostle saith, when speaking of Christ,—"Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses."* And in another place, St. Paul in his epistle to the Colossians says,—"In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:"—and to shew the eternal godhead of Christ, he adds, —"For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible, and invisible, whether they be thrones, or

* Acts, xiii. 39.

dominions, or principalities, or powers, all things were created by him, and for him."* Thus the Christian religion stands unrivalled amidst all the efforts of infidelity, not only for the purity of its precepts, but also for the sublime influence of its doctrines.

The boasted lights of unassisted reason have never yet been able to remove the horrors of a guilty conscience, or to mitigate the pungent miseries of remorse. But the doctrine of a crucified Redeemer, though it be to the Jew a stumbling block, or to the Greek foolishness, yet to those who know the blessings of forgiveness, it is the power of God, and the wisdom of God. It is, in fact, the ground of their support even in a dying hour!—We may further remark, that Christ not only died to secure the forgiveness of our sins, but he now liveth to intercede in behalf of those who repent, and believe in the virtue, and efficacy of his atonement. Even now, we may behold him, with the eye of faith, pleading in our behalf,—"Father, forgive them!" If Christ offered up the petition in my text, even for his

* Colos. i. 14. 16.

persecutors, and murderers, surely he will in no wise cast out any who come unto him by faith. The blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin; and therefore none need despair of mercy, who seek it in the way of God's appointment.

I proceed now to attend to the plea here adopted in my text.—Speaking of the Jews, who crucified him, our Lord says,—"they know not what they do."—St. Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, says he speaks of the wisdom of God in a mystery, "which none of the princes of this world knew, for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory."* When the great apostle of the gentiles, previous to his conversion, persecuted the followers of Christ, he says,—"I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly, and in unbelief."—Where there is a want of the means of knowledge, or a defect in the capacity to receive instruction, many tender allowances may be justly urged in behalf of those who err. But where we sin against light, and knowledge, against the clearest conviction of conscience, it is an aggravation of our crime,

* I. Cor. ii. 8.

and shews that we are hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.—We are told, that our Lord's petition in behalf of his persecutors was answered soon after; for many of those, who were accessary to his death, were converted by the preaching of St. Peter.—In the plea which our Lord adopts in the words of my text, it is evident that he distinguishes between those who fall into error through ignorance, and those who deliberately pervert the minds of others. The infidel, who studiously undermines the foundations of religion, and who thereby crucifies Christ afresh, is acting under a principle that is hateful to God, and ruinous to man. By misleading the ignorant, and seducing the unwary, he is heaping up to himself "wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; who will render to every man according to his deeds."*

Thus having shewn that the principal end of our Lord's crucifixion, is to procure the forgiveness of our sins, and to fulfil the law of

* Rom. ii. 5, 6.

God as our great surety; I shall conclude with some practical inferences from the whole.

First, we may infer from the nature of that atonement, which is requisite to expiate the guilt of our crimes, that all sin is hateful to God, and must be punished either in the person of the surety, or in that of the offender. Little as men are inclined to think of their conduct, in a vortex of gaiety, or in a round of amusement, there will be no eluding the eye of omniscience, in the great day of future retribution. Thus, although we are redeemed by the blood of Christ, and must build all our hopes of happiness on this sure foundation; yet we are bound, as those who are bought with a price, to live in all godliness, and honesty, and in an uniform course of piety, and virtue. Our faith must be evidenced by our works; for it is not those who merely cry Lord, Lord, that shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but those who endeavour to do the will of God, who is in heaven. Again, from the manner in which Christ prayed for those who crucified him, we have a brilliant pattern of forgiveness, pity, and forbearance, even towards those who

have openly, or secretly injured us: who, perhaps, "not knowing what they do," are wounding our reputation, and destroying our comforts, under the fatal infatuation of mistaken prejudices. Let us then imitate the example of our dying Lord, who, whilst he was suspended between two thieves, prayed for his very murderers,—"Father, forgive them!"

We may further infer from our Lord's petition, that unless our sins are forgiven, we can have no happiness, no security, and no escape from the wrath to come!—How can we then rest contented in a careless indifference about that which must involve in it our eternal destiny?—Surely we can have no real peace of mind, even amidst the busy scenes of life, until this great point be fully, and clearly ascertained. Through faith in Christ, and repentance towards God, we must enjoy this inestimable blessing, which will prepare us to endure the severest troubles, and brighten the most awful hour of death!—We may also draw this pleasing inference from the crucifixion of Christ,—that no man need despair of mercy, who seeks it through faith in the Redeemer's

blood; "for when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly."*

Let us, then, who have been this day commemorating the bleeding agonies of our expiring Lord, remember, that it was our sins against God that occasioned him to cry out,—My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?—Let us look on him, whom our offences have pierced, and mourn. Let us bewail, with unaffected grief, the guilt and depravity of our nature, the hardness of our hearts, and the irregularity of our lives. Instead of returning to our former evil courses, and thereby tearing open his bleeding wounds, let us be melted into deep contrition for our past offences; and implore the aids of the Holy Spirit, to direct our thoughts, regulate our affections, increase our faith, and prepare us for the holiness of heaven. Let us further recollect, that he who died on the cross, will come again to judge the world, and to take vengeance on them who obey not his gospel. If we venture to reject this only remedy for our spiritual diseases, if

* Rom. v. 6.

we refuse the offers of mercy through Christ, no other way of escape will be open for us. Let me intreat you then to reflect on the true state of your minds, ever remembering, that they who name the name of Christ, in a sincere profession of his doctrines, must depart from iniquity. As a proof of our integrity, let us renounce every practice that is contrary to our holy religion, and be aspiring after a growth in grace, for we are positively assured,—"They that are Christ's, have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts."* If then we have powerful motives to the practice of every virtue, from a reviewal of the divine goodness, in the temporal mercies we enjoy; we must assuredly be influenced by the irresistible impulse of gratitude to glorify God, when we reflect on the benefits of redemption which are freely conferred on us, through the crucifixion and death of Christ!—Here the divine philanthropy appears in the most brilliant colours. Let us then be emulous to adorn our profession of the gospel, by the fruits of a holy life,—by a strict and conscientious regard to the duties of our various stations,—that the sublime and unri-

* Gal, v. 24.

valled precepts of morality, which are inculcated in the religion of Jesus, may be the genuine effusions of gratitude, and love.—Let us then reasonably infer from the atonement, and death of Christ, that the force of moral obligations is uniformly increased; that the costly ransom which it required to expiate our offences, exhibits the guilt, and deformity of vice, in the most impressive view; and that it should lead us to reverence the dictates of truth and virtue, in our daily intercourse with the world, by avoiding even the appearance of evil!

Surely then we cannot too highly estimate those doctrines, which open to us the avenue to future glory; which reveal a way of obtaining the pardon of our offences, without lessening the claims of virtue; which give energy to our noblest actions; fervour, and confidence to our hopes; and which regulate our whole demeanour, by a zeal that is according to knowledge. "Let us," then, "lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us; and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto

Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."*

* Heb. xii. 1, 2.

SERMON VIII.

GALATIANS IV. PART OF VER. 18.

"But it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing."

THE passions, which are the elements of the soul, are not extinguished, but regulated by religion. They are like the chief spring in a piece of mechanism, which is requisite to put every work in motion, and which contributes to the benefit of the whole. To divest men of passions, would be to reduce them to the apathy of a Stoic, and to check even the powers of intellect in the warmest effusions of gratitude, and praise. We mount on the wings of love to the adoration of God, to the contemplation of heaven, and to the bliss of seraphic spirits. We rise above the groveling pursuits of this theatre of woe, and mix for a

moment in the extasy of joy, with the purer intelligences of the celestial world. Why should the ardour of love, the caution of fear, or the consolations of hope, be wholly devoted to the trivial objects of this lower sphere? Are there no pursuits more worthy our supreme regard?—When we reflect on the goodness of God, and our own unworthiness; when our numerous transgressions are placed in array before us, and the love of God shines resplendent to the view, through the redemption that is in Christ; it may justly kindle the fervour of devotion, and inspire us with unabating joy. Our prayers will be only the lifeless repetition of words, if our passions be not consecrated to God. Through the depravity of our nature, the passions have been the agents of vice, and the vassals of corruption; but under the auspices of religion, they are employed in the cause of virtue, and animate us in the constant practice of all holy obedience. In the chapter from which my text is taken, St. Paul had been writing to the Galatians, to convince them of their sin, and folly, in departing from the truth of the gospel; and after cautioning them against being seduced by the pretended zeal of

those who had not the most upright intentions, he adds, in the words of my text,—"But it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing."

For our further edification and improvement, I shall endeavour, with divine assistance, to consider,

1st. The various kinds, and degrees of zeal.

2d. The proper objects of it.

3d. The motives, and arguments which are principally calculated to promote it.

In a sphere so full of relative duties as the present, where we are exposed to unexpected incidents, to perpetual changes, to contending interests, and to local prejudices; we cannot securely relapse into listless insensibility, or cold indifference. Man seems evidently formed for the active duties of life, and therefore passions were implanted in his breast, which, under the controul of reason, and religion, may give energy to his virtues, fervour to his hopes,

and ardour to his brilliant graces of charity, and love. Were it possible that we could live to answer no other end than our personal interest, or advancement, no generous impulse might be wanting: but, happily for us, the god-like employment of "doing good," is the noblest triumph of virtue. This calls forth our passions of tenderness, and sympathy, in a thousand shapes; and fans the spark of philanthropy within, which irradiates, and illumines every station that we fill.—"Here then it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing." He who pleads for the widow, or the orphan, who treads the gloomy abodes of woe in this vale of tears, should be fired with zeal in a cause which it is his supreme felicity to support. But as zeal is too often misplaced, and under the sole guidance of ignorance and enthusiasm, it will be useful to enquire into its various kinds, and degrees, that we may determine when it is the agent of wisdom, or the blind impulse of folly.

First, in religion, there is a zeal which is not according to knowledge. This was manifest in the Jews of old, who were anxious to

comply with every outward requirement of the law, whilst they neglected its weightier duties, justice, judgment, and charity. Nor is it less manifest in numbers amongst us, who confine all their notions of religion to particular forms, and who establish them as a justifying righteousness before God, instead of the righteousness of Christ. These are the "blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel." These "outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within are full of hypocrisy, and iniquity."* This mistaken zeal hath arisen from entertaining too low notions of the holiness of God, and too high an opinion of our own. We are hereby led to appreciate our defective virtues far beyond their intrinsic excellence, and to call the bare performance of duty, a meritorious claim to future reward. We forget that God will not justify any one without a perfect righteousness, and therefore he hath provided a full, and ample atonement for sin, through the redemption that is in Christ. This blind zeal arises not only from a mistaken view of the moral law, its nature, and extent; forgetting that it requires strict, and unsinning obedience in

* St. Matt. xxiii. 24, 28.

thought, word, and deed; but it is also owing to a total ignorance of our own character. When the spirit of God has once convinced us of sin, and has shewn us what we really are, we shall be anxious to be found in Christ alone, as "the Lord our righteousness." There is also a mistaken zeal, when we prostitute the venerable name of religion, to advance only our interests, or opinions; and when we persecute those who differ from us either in a mode of worship, or in doctrinal theories. Thus the scribes and pharisees persecuted even the meek and lowly Jesus, though he came on an errand of love. This mistaken zeal further displays itself, when we pursue things as tending to promote the glory of God, which are calculated to produce effects diametrically opposite. This was evinced in the zeal of the idolatrous Gentiles; and also in that of the Papists, for the worship of images, relics, and the like. Superstition and enthusiasm have unitedly defaced the artless simplicity of truth. For what can be a more mistaken zeal, than to make religion consist in a down-cast look, in the gloom of dulness, or in a habit of prescribed dimensions? True piety is seated in the heart; and

whilst it mourns inwardly for the guilt of sin, it looks with an eye of faith to a crucified Redeemer, who hath made a full and ample atonement for sin, and who hath brought in an everlasting righteousness. A mistaken zeal leads men to take improper ways and methods for advancing the interests of religion; as was manifest even in the followers of Christ, who were rebuked by our blessed Lord for wishing fire to come down from heaven, to destroy those who obstinately refused the glorious invitations of the gospel. And indeed it is evident from ecclesiastical, no less than profane history, that numbers have unhappily mistaken the true spirit and genius of our holy religion, which is mild, gentle, and persuasive; which addresses itself to the reason, and understanding of men; using no other mode of enforcing its precepts, but the authority of scripture, the evidence of facts, the demonstrations of truth, and the positive command of God. If men are determined to resist the influence of a pure religion, and obey not the gospel, let us pray for them, but not persecute them,—"For it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him;

if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."*

Indeed, though the prominent feature of the present day is rather a want of zeal for religion, than any intemperate effusions to promote its important interests; yet it is highly probable that many have betrayed a mistaken zeal, who associate their own eccentricities, vulgarities, and even follies, with the pure, the rational, and the sublime truths of the gospel. There may be also an hypocritical zeal, as when men only court popularity to advance their personal interest; or as in Jehu, when he said,—"come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord,"† when he paid no regard to the commands of God, and did this only to be seen of men; for he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam. This kind of zeal was also manifest in the scribes and pharisees, who brought the woman taken in adultery to Christ, under a pretence of great regard to the law: and also in Judas, who affected a love for the poor, when he

* Rom. xii. 19, 20, 21. † II. Kings x. 16.

meant only to gratify his own covetousness. The pharisees also made a great outward appearance of religion, by their long prayers, and making broad their phylacteries; whilst our Lord told them, they were secretly devouring widows houses, and guilty of every act of cruelty and oppression. There is also a contentious zeal about matters of small moment, whilst errors of greater magnitude remain unnoticed. But whilst a true zeal is a noble stimulus to virtue, it springs from a fervent, and undissembled love to God; an ardent wish to promote his glory; and as it is the fruit of knowledge, and the emanation of faith, it is regulated by wisdom, actuated by integrity, and productive of good. The zeal which flows from a saving knowledge of Christ, unfeigned faith, and real love, will stimulate us to the practice of every duty, animate us under every discouragement, and induce us to persevere unto the end. It stands justly opposed to that neutral spirit in religion, which is indifferent to all doctrines, and sincere in none; where truth, or error, pass equally unheeded; and where men act as though no revelation had been given; and as though right, or wrong,

had no material distinction. To this culpable, this despicable indifference, we owe the ignorance of many as to the very doctrines they ostensibly profess, and the easy intrusion of seductive errors, and corrupt opinions. This fatal neutrality in religion, has arisen partly from the prevalence of scepticism, and the common defects of early education. Elijah wisely condemned this halting between two opinions in the Jews of old, saying,—"If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him."* A lukewarm, or careless spirit in religion, is not only criminal, but dangerous; for whilst we are delaying the enquiry, under the delusions of carnal security, our destiny may be fixed, our state determined, and we inclosed within the dreary tomb, from which we can none of us return, either to repent of our errors, or to remedy our mistakes!

Thus having shewn the various kinds and degrees of zeal, I shall next briefly consider the proper objects of it.—First, then, God hath an unrivalled claim to the warmest effusions of adoration and love. Whilst the world,

* I. KINGS, xviii. 21.

and all its vanities, engross our affections, we ought to dedicate our hearts to God. Unless this be the altar of gratitude, on which we offer our sublimest virtues, they cannot be acceptable to him, who regardeth not the outward appearance, but who looketh on the heart. External forms may amuse, or deceive our fellow-creatures, but God knoweth the inmost recesses of the mind. With him, integrity, and not professions only, will be ultimately availing. Our faith must work by love,—and our obedience be the willing tribute of a grateful mind. Love, is the fulfilling of the law, and the basis of all religion. The worship of God, and the truths of revelation, are also proper objects of our unabating zeal. The "Three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost," and which "three are one," in the unity of the divine essence, will be the proper object of our religious worship, to which our zeal will be uniformly directed. The authenticity also of the holy scriptures will employ our zeal, in opposition to the prevailing scepticism and infidelity of the age: for if we lose our compass through the mighty ocean of life, we are in

danger of making shipwreck of faith, and a good conscience. The holy scriptures are the only rule of our faith, and practice; the map to conduct us in our journey to the heavenly Canaan; and the fountain of comfort, instruction, and delight. To what object, therefore, can our zeal be more properly directed, than to reverence the word of God, which is alone able to make us wise unto salvation.

The gospel of Christ is enough to kindle in our breasts an unabating zeal, when we reflect that it contains the glad tidings of pardon and peace to a ruined world, through the blood of the Cross. Shall we be elated at the triumphs of an hour, and feel no extasy of joy at the glories of redemption? This gospel is the herald of mercy, the avenue to bliss, and the very portal of heaven! The free grace of God in Christ, will be the theme of eternal ages; and shall we sit indifferent when we hear of it, or even be too dull to prize its unequalled blessings? Shall we prefer the baubles of this perishing world, to Jesus, the pearl of great price? Rather let us be fired with increasing zeal to discover our personal interest in Christ,

and to know, on the authority of God's word, that he who died for sinners, died also for us. Here will be ample, and proper space for our zeal to display itself; for who can do too much in giving all diligence, to make his calling, and election sure?

As our zeal should be employed in favour of every thing that is good, so it should likewise be directed against those things which are obviously evil. Here neutrality would be a tacit encouragement of vice.—Thus our zeal must appear against all false, or idolatrous worship, all errors in doctrine, and immoralities in practice. If we pay no regard to the progress of error, we undervalue the blessings of truth, and render even our belief doubtful, and suspicious. Had there been no importance in holding fast our profession of religion, why did prophets, apostles, and martyrs risk every temporal advancement, and finally seal their avowal of truth with their blood? Lastly, true believers in Christ should be zealous to maintain good works, to adorn their profession with the uniform practice of every virtue, that even the adversaries of truth may be constrained to own

the happy influence of our holy religion. This laudable zeal will be productive of the most extensive benefit; and it will be our emulation not merely to rest contented with doing no harm, but we shall be ambitious to follow the pattern of our divine Redeemer, who constantly "went about doing good."

I shall now close my discourse by briefly considering the motives, and arguments, which are principally calculated to promote our zeal. The first reason I shall urge is, that life is short, and we have no time to lose. This should not only stimulate us to be as useful as we can in our respective stations, but also to remember that the Judge is at the door, and our fate may be speedily determined.—Again,—religion requires all the zeal we can practise, for we have many enemies to contend with;—a deceitful heart,—numerous temptations,—and a sinful world. Christ bids us "strive" to enter in at the strait gate of heaven; and there can be no striving without zeal. The prize of future glory must not be coldly enquired after, but we must "press forward with earnestness." The scriptures tell us, we

must run in order to obtain. The Christian life is compared to a race,—to a warfare,—and neither of these can succeed without zeal.—Further,—the bliss of heaven will amply repay all the pains, or zeal, that we can employ about it on earth. And if we reverse the scene,—shall we have no zeal to avoid the torments of hell; to escape the lake which burneth with fire; where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth? Do we take no alarm at the thought of being lost for ever? Think, how anxious we are to obtain earthly riches; and what are these, to the favour of God, and the salvation of the soul? Our blessed Lord was a pattern of zeal. What did he encounter to spread the glorious news of a preached gospel? He dwelt in the lonely wilderness forty days and forty nights without food; he waded through the sea; and had not even a place where to lay his head. Christ's zeal also against all vice, and immorality, was manifest in reproof, even at the risk of his life. We may also remark, that a lukewarm temper is not consistent with true religion. For what can be the nature of our faith, or the degree of our repentance, if there be no zeal, no fervour in

either? Indeed the scriptures inform us, that to be neither cold, or hot, is condemned, as having no religion at all. As zeal proceeds from love to God, we render it at least very doubtful, where we are careless and indifferent. The pharisees took great pains, compassing sea and land, to make one proselyte,—what then ought to be our zeal in the cause of truth? To kindle this holy fervour, let us often reflect on the love of God in providing a way for our escape from punishment, through the death of Christ: let us seriously think on those bitter agonies which our Lord endured for our sakes: and on the blessings of the gospel, the excellence of religion, and the glories of futurity.

Thus having shewn the various kinds and degrees of zeal; the proper objects of it; and the motives, or arguments calculated to promote it; I would now urge you to implore the aids of the divine Spirit, to rouse you from the lethargy of sin, and to animate you with increasing ardour in the ways of God. Let us think what is before us,—an eternity of happiness, or of misery!—Heaven now offers admission through the mediation of Christ;—let

us not, through sloth or unbelief, plunge ourselves into the depths of hell! Let us wing our way towards those blest abodes, where purity and perfection reign: where the redeemed are joining in one ascription of praise, with a zeal that shall never be quenched, saying,—"with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing."*

* Rev. v. 12.

SERMON IX.

ST. MATTHEW, XIII. VER. 58.

"And he did not many mighty works there, because of their unbelief."

IF remoter ages of antiquity were enveloped in the gloom of superstition, a spirit totally opposite in its nature, and effects, hath distinguished the more advanced ages of the world. Instead of reverencing those precepts which have all the marks of divine authority, we find many contending for theories which have no foundation in reason, fact, or experience. Is it that our genius becomes so expanded by the progress of time, that it wings its way beyond the boundaries usually allotted it? Or is it, that we are influenced by tempers, and habits less teachable, patient, and persevering? Or is it, that the affectation of superior wisdom

induces us to despise the triumphs of faith, the consolations of religion, or the hope of future glory? Perhaps a reply to these questions may be readily found in the language of holy writ, —"Men loved darkness, rather than light, because their deeds were evil."*—Our errors may be often accounted for in our practice. The man who wishes to have no restraint on his sinful appetites, will of course be averse to those truths, which have an immediate tendency to regulate and subdue them. Thus, when the Jews were looking for a temporal deliverer, instead of him, who would not break the bruised reed, or quench the smoking flax, they rejected the mild, and peaceful errand of the meek, and lowly Jesus. The humbling doctrines of his pure, and holy religion, did not suit either their pride, or their prejudices; and consequently they rejected his mission. Hence they upbraided our Lord with the meanness, and poverty of his ostensible parents, and therefore we read in the words of my text,—"He did not many mighty works there, because of their unbelief." These words suggest to us,

* St. John iii. 19.

1st. The principal cause why the doctrines of Christ are rejected by men.

2d. The influence, and effects of unbelief.

3d. The importance of having that faith, which amends, and improves our practice.

Whoever hath studied human nature will uniformly acknowledge, the constant propensity of man to run into extremes. If, in the unlettered ages of the world, men defaced the simplicity of religion by the most ignorant, and foolish superstitions; it is an extreme equally irrational for us to withhold our assent to truths, which are placed before us with every weight of evidence, and every demonstration of fact. A revelation which treats of spiritual, and supernatural truths, must discover to us many things which cannot be known through the ordinary mediums of knowledge. Indeed the very objects which address our senses, the air we breathe, the plants we see, and the very earth on which we tread, exhibit to us properties through the gradations of time, which were once occult, latent, and unknown. We

are convinced many things in nature are true, without being able fully to ascertain how, or why they are so justly entitled to our belief. Of many things we judge by the effects produced, when all the various concurrent incidents which have caused them, are not within the limit of human wisdom. Here then the philosopher is called upon to exercise a faith, in no degree unworthy of his acutest penetration. The boundary to his restless curiosity is fixed; and he does not attempt to deny the whole, because he only understands a part.

To require that kind of proof of historical facts, or of moral propositions, that we demand in a process of experimental philosophy, would be no less irrational, than to deny the truth of what we see, because we could not account for the manner in which it is brought to our view! Thus the doctrines of Christ, being of a spiritual nature, relate to the attributes of the Deity; to the purity, and perfection of his laws; to the way in which he will pardon our numerous offences; and to the duties which are incumbent on us as reasonable, and accountable creatures. These important truths,

which are so excellent in their nature, so vast in their effects, so necessary to our real happiness, are rejected by men, because they humble their pride, and expose their vices. Hence the pharisees, who had all the outward appearance of religion, were very averse to the doctrines of Christ. They could not bear the voice of reproof, or those direct charges which tended to lessen them in the estimation of the people. He who requireth the tribute of a willing mind, the oblations of a meek and contrite spirit, said,—"Woe unto you, scribes and pharisees, hypocrites; for ye make clean the outside of the cup, and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion, and excess. Thou blind pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also."* This plain reproof humbled the pride of the pharisees; and consequently they were prejudiced against a doctrine, which exposed the fallacy of their pretensions. So blinded are we by flattery, and so unwilling to confess our errors, that it is no wonder the doctrines of Christianity have in all ages been opposed by men, who are naturally

* St. Matt. xxiii. 25. 26.

inflated with an idea of their own piety, and excellence. Mere formalists in religion have in every age of time been strict to maintain the outward display of holiness, however the temper, and dispositions of the heart, have been utterly unnoticed, and neglected. The man who expects to merit heaven by his own obedience, is inimical to a doctrine which leads us to renounce every confidence in our own goodness, and to rely wholly for pardon, and justification, on the full, finished, and perfect righteousness of Christ. Hence we find our Lord said of old,—"They that be whole, need not a physician, but they that are sick. I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."* We must see our lost, and miserable condition by nature, and practice, before we shall come to Christ for the pardon of our offences. So perverse is our fallen nature, that we do not value the mercies which are freely offered us in the gospel, until we feel our misery, and our need of relief. We are indeed by nature, "tied and bound in the chain of our sins," until the Spirit of God looses us from our bondage, and unites us to

* St. Matt. ix. 12, 13.

Christ by a living faith. Thus the pride of the carnal mind, which is enmity with God, furnishes us with ample reason why men reject the doctrines of the gospel.

Again, the progress of infidelity may be further accounted for, because the religion of Jesus is too strict in its nature for the careless, the dissipated, or profane. Men who are wholly immersed in the gaieties, or pleasures of the world, feel no inclination to take up their cross, and follow Christ. They are ashamed of the reproach or ridicule of their worldly companions; and would rather join even a multitude to do evil, than appear singular, or different from the rest of mankind. As they do not choose to be controuled in their criminal pursuits, they prefer the doctrine which allows them in the indulgence of unlawful pleasures, to the precepts which forbid even the earliest propensity to evil. Hence we see men, who cease to yield the obedience of faith, bound by no ties of either duty, or interest, and going with rapid strides from one degree of profligacy to another. So closely is our practice connected with our opinions, that

when we cease to fear the God who made us, we cannot be easily restrained by any sense of moral obligation.

The doctrines of Christ have been rejected by men, owing to their falsely reasoning against the use, from the abuse of them. Conclusions drawn from any premises like this, would operate with equal force against any maxim of philosophy. For a fact is not the less true, because it is perverted, or abused. Again,—a trifling, and a speculative spirit unitedly forms a frequent hindrance to the progress of religion. Instead of studying the word of God with an honest, and ardent wish to be informed, many totally neglect the perusal of this inspired volume; and others read it with a previous determination to cavil with its contents, to object to its precepts, and to justify their wilful unbelief. Lastly, the hardness, and impenitency of our hearts, added to the deceitfulness of sin, constitute the principal causes, why men reject the doctrines of the gospel. Unless the Spirit of God, which first moved on the face of the waters, bend our stubborn wills, and soften our obdurate minds, we shall remain

indifferent to the voice of truth, amidst the testimony of facts, or the admonitions of conscience. Owing to the depravity of human nature, we fatally prefer the things which our deliberate judgment must condemn; and thus the prevalence of infidelity is rather to be ascribed to an aversion to religious truth, than to any defect of evidence. If a doctrine which is contrary to our taste be proposed to our belief, it has every prejudice to encounter, and the most formidable difficulties to overcome. Hence our Lord forewarned his real followers, of the opposition they must expect, from a gay, a censorious, and an unbelieving world.—"If ye were of the world," said he, "the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."*

I proceed now to consider the influence, and effects of unbelief.

When the mind is induced to think lightly of the great, and awful concerns of the soul; when it treats religion as an uninteresting spe-

* St. John xv. 19.

culation; and the records of truth, as of doubtful authority; the practice will be equally careless, and proportionally immoral. If we presume to question the divine law, or to arraign the councils of heaven at the bar of human reason, we shall be no further restrained in our conduct, than as fear operates on the one hand, or a regard to reputation on the other. The mind, instead of being under the pure, and humble influence of piety; instead of being guided by faith, hope, and charity, to a purer intercourse with heaven; instead of cultivating the graces of a meek, and contrite spirit, will be ferocious, turbulent, cruel, and unjust. Or, if the refinements of learning may in a degree polish the manners, yet a prevailing contempt for all serious enquiries will confirm them in habits of vice, and ultimately prepare the mind for the perpetration of the foulest crimes. A rational creature, destitute of religion, is like a vessel wrecked on the boisterous ocean, and ready to be engulphed in the trackless deep! He has no pilot to guide, no compass to direct, no security in the voyage of life. The fatal influence of unbelief is too manifest in the world, to need any specific notice.

When the mind, which is naturally depraved, loses all reverence for virtue, the practice will have no boundary to limit its daring atrocities. The effects of unbelief are so ruinous to the morals, to the peace, and to the happiness of mankind, that we have abundant reason to deplore its ravages, where its seductive poison spreads. And when we think of our condition before God, we shall find that unbelief places us in a state of condemnation. It is denying the authority of God, the veracity of his word, and the truth of his promises. It is the fruitful parent of every evil we commit; and stimulates us to crimes, which even our judgment, and our consciences forbid. In whatever degree it prevails in regenerate men, it embitters their comforts, darkens their evidences, and obstructs their progress in the ways of God. The gospel is, indeed the power of God unto salvation,—but then it is to every one that believes. If we reject the offers of mercy, they will still retain their excellence, though we shall be irretrievably ruined by our own conduct.

Christ did not perform many mighty works amongst his own countrymen, because of their unbelief. And thus, if men will not receive the declarations of truth, in the appointed means of grace, or are disgusted with its simplicity, its plainness, or its unassuming graces; they must abide the issue of their determined folly. But our obstinate refusal of the blessings of grace, will not pass unnoticed. For though "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world thro' him might be saved; yet he that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."* By rejecting the only possible way of obtaining the forgiveness of our sins, we are under the curse of a broken law, become debtors to fulfil its demands to the utmost, and are preparing to endure the weight of future punishment. The sting of death hereby derives additional strength. We in fact exclude ourselves by unbelief from those unspeakable blessings which are freely offered in the gospel, to all who are only willing to embrace them,

* St. John, iii. 17, 18.

Though the door of mercy is thrown open to all who are inclined to enter in, through faith in Christ, yet unbelievers shut it against themselves, and defy the arm of omnipotence!—Christ is the end of the law for justification; but to whom?—"To every one that believeth." So that although forgiveness is obtained for sinners through the obedience, and death of Christ, yet the benefit will not be ours, without faith. Our Lord makes only two alternatives,—"He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned."* This is the plain, and unequivocal language of Christ himself, whether we receive it, or reject it. Our unbelief cannot alter the purposes of God. And whatever speculations we adopt, yet truth undergoes no change in its nature, tendency, or effects. We are assured that without faith it is impossible to please God; and therefore our best works, if they do not flow from this principle, will be weighed in the balance, and found wanting.

I shall now close my discourse by pointing out, in a few words, the importance of having

* St. Mark, xvi. 10.

that faith which amends, and improves our practice.—The belief which is likely to ameliorate our conduct, must be seated not only in the head, but in the heart. It must be not merely a theory of opinions, but a principle that governs our choice. In short, it must proceed, not only from knowledge, but also from converting grace; and, as the fruit of the Holy Spirit, it will in a greater, or less degree, regulate our behaviour, and lead us to abound in every Christian virtue. The faith which many pretend to have, whose lives are contradictory, and immoral, is nothing more than a speculative belief. But the faith of a sincere Christian, will make the prevailing tenor of his conduct such, as is highly becoming our profession of the gospel. Let it then be the highest emulation of our lives, in every sphere we fill, to shew the good, and the useful effects of the religion we profess. Primitive Christians were distinguished by loving one another! Surely Christianity is still the same, whatever be the fatal errors of its avowed professors. If we wish to evince our reverence for truth, let it be by the luminous display of every moral and social virtue; by fidelity, and integrity in

our various avocations; by a peaceable, and orderly demeanour; by every emanation of beneficence and compassion: that when the great Author, and Finisher of our Faith, shall enquire at the last day, how we have used the talent entrusted to our care, he may acknowledge us truly to belong to him!—As the "just shall live by faith," let us not be of them, "who draw back unto perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the soul."*

* Heb. x. 38, 39.

SERMON X.

JOB, XVII. VER. 11.

"My days are past, my purposes are broken off,
*"even the thoughts of my heart."**

IF there be any period when it more especially becomes us to review our past lives, to reflect on our conduct, and to examine our ways, it is at the approaching close of the year. The time which is already spent, the opportunities which are in many respects irrecoverable, and the additional weight of responsibility incurred, are considerations that forcibly suggest to us the importance of vigilance and care. The false medium through which we are apt to view our own actions, and the numerous excuses we find for our own errors, unitedly hinder the progress of improvement, and the interests of virtue. But in order to acquire a

* A Sermon on the close of the Year.

just idea of our advancement, or decline in holiness, we must view our actions not through the inverted mirror of fashionable galeties, but in the glass of that perfect law, which God hath prescribed as a rule of life, and behaviour. Here we shall see, that the obedience of the heart is required of all rational creatures, whose affections should be supremely dedicated to God, instead of being wholly occupied with the transient pleasures of a precarious world. How little, through the past year, has our time been consecrated to piety, to reflection, to prayer, to the chief, and most important end of our being?—The days are gone, and cannot be recalled, in which Wisdom hath cried to us in every path we trod;—"How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity, and scorners hate knowledge?" The whole history of man is a repetition of errors; and the benefits we may derive from a reviewal of them are, humility, and contrition for the past, and turning with full purpose of heart unto the Lord, as the only security and hope for the future.

In the chapter from which my text is taken, we find Job reflecting on the severe treatment he had received even from his friends; and viewing himself as a dying man, he appeals to God, as the fountain of mercy, the source of goodness, the only refuge and support of those who are in trouble! And after rejecting the fallacious maxims of his friends, he adds,—"My days are past, my purposes are broken off, even the thoughts of my heart."

For our further edification, I shall consider,

1st. The important facts referred to in the text.

2d. The improvement we should make of the brevity of life.

The objects that so powerfully attract our notice, and make so strong an impression on the mind, derive their influence principally from their being present to the view. Our reasoning faculties are not so much convinced of their excellence, as our senses are affected by their being actually before us. But as man

is formed for eternity, and hath an immaterial principle within him, capable of travelling far on the wings of thought; it is his duty, and interest, to look back on the journey of life; and more especially when it is hastening to an end. Nor is this a duty that merely devolves on the aged, for the youngest cannot tell how soon their career may finish. It is a work that belongs to men of every age, rank, and station; to all who look beyond the confines of the grave, or the instinctive annihilation of the brute.

We are surrounded by innumerable relations to God, to the community, to the sphere we fill, and to the duties we are bound to discharge. We have many important claims on our fidelity, diligence and care; and we have at last to give up an account of our proceedings to an almighty, and unerring Judge. We are not filling up an idle void, a mere blank in existence; but we have each of us an important part to act on the stage of life, and must eventually be answerable to the God who made us, for the talents entrusted to our care. Our breath is suspended on the will of God; and

it is continued to us for a wise, and important purpose. The time, and opportunities given us to believe, and to repent,—to reason, and to reflect,—to pray, and to meditate,—will form a tremendous part in our future reckoning, if we venture now to trifle away our fleeting moments, and to abuse our mercies! Job felt the impression of that weighty thought, —"My days are past." If, in the giddy hours of youth, in the full tide of prosperity, in the vortex of gaiety and pleasure, we have forgotten the name of our God, and rejected the admonitions of wisdom, we must each of us say with Job,—"My days are past." But the great enquiry should be,—In what manner have I spent these days? Though they are past, they are not unnoticed. Though they are gone, yet they will be brought forward again by conscience to our view. Job indeed reviewed the approaching termination of his life with pleasure, knowing that when worms should destroy this body, in his flesh he should see God. He looked forward with an holy confidence to him, in whom he had believed, and chearfully sought a retreat in the grave, where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are

at rest. But when the man who has lived in all manner of iniquity, who has defrauded the innocent, and seduced the virtuous, who has despised the holy precepts of religion; when he looks back to the days that are past, to the enquiry that is hastening on, it must be with horror and dismay! There are others also, who have probably avoided the more open enormities of vice, but who have wasted their time in a round of unmeaning trifles,—in the triumphs of vanity,—in scenes of amusement,—and in an uniform study to please, or benefit none but themselves. A reviewal of these days, when they are past, will plant a thorn in our pillow, and fix the pungent sting of remorse deeply in our breast. Surely man was formed for a nobler employ on earth, than merely to "eat, drink, and be merry!"—The dignified powers of intellect were given him, to glorify and adore their almighty donor; to survey the wonders of creation; to imitate the purity, and admire the goodness of redeeming love; to soothe the orphan's woe, and commiserate the widow's grief; to enter the abodes of poverty, and sympathize with the afflicted, and distressed; to cultivate the means

of knowledge; to be earnest in the pursuit of truth; to rejoice in the obedience of faith; and to be preparing for the bliss of glory!

When we reflect on the days that are past, we should also seriously consider, they were granted, and allowed us by the patience, goodness, and forbearance of God, to try our graces, —to call forth proofs of our gratitude,—to see what use we should make of them, not merely to accomplish purposes of our own, but to glorify the God who formed us. He, who hath appointed the bounds of our habitation, will also require of us a strict account how we have employed the benefits we are indulged with. This is very sublimely described by the prophet, in all the majesty of eastern rhetoric: —"And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me, and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes? And now go to, I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard; I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten

up, and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down."* Our days that have been past in vanity, may be fitly described by the metaphor of "wild grapes;" where the lord of the vineyard had just reason to expect better fruit from those, whom he had guarded by his power, and instructed by his wisdom. The most exemplary Christians have too much reason to be ashamed of the manner in which they have spent the days that are past, when they reflect on their high, and holy calling,—on the dangers that await them,—on the need of using all diligence, to make the evidence of their calling and election sure,—and on the final ruin that must await those, who neglect this great salvation, which Christ hath wrought out for the guilty. How few of the days which are past, have been spent in striving to enter into the strait gate of eternal life! How slowly have we run the Christian race, when so glorious a prize was to be obtained! How little have we mortified our corrupt passions, and opposed the first solicitations to evil! How cold and lifeless have our days of devotion been! How formal, and careless our prayers! In the days that are

* Isaiah v. 4, 5.

past, how rarely have we been in earnest to know whether our sins are forgiven through the atoning blood of Christ! Instead of growing in grace as we advanced in years, have we not imbibed the spirit of the world, and become indifferent to the great interests of the soul? Have we not been immersed in the cares and pleasures of this life, though we professed to seek our portion in another? Have the troubles, or afflictions we have met with in the past year, brought us nearer to God, and made us more anxious to secure our eternal welfare? Or have we murmured, and repined at the providence of God, instead of owning the wisdom and the goodness of his chastening rod? Has Christ been precious to us, as real believers, or have we been contented in an outward form of godliness, whilst our hearts have been strangers to converting grace? Let us enter on a strict and impartial enquiry now, for there is no device, nor work in the grave, whither we are all of us hastening.

After Job mentions the past days of his life, he adds,—"My purposes are broken off, even the thoughts of my heart!"—This exhibits to

our view the vain career of fruitless expectations, and unavailing cares, in which we are all of us, more or less, engaged. Job had, doubtless, in the hour of prosperity, pleased himself with many flattering projects, which were never ultimately compleated. And on an impartial retrospect of our former days, shall we not find, that many of our brightest expectations have ended in disappointment, and eluded our keenest grasp? Surely we may each of us affirm with Job,—"My purposes are broken off, even the thoughts of my heart." The disappointments which are daily occurring in this life, are wisely intended for our good, that our affections may be weaned from present objects, and directed to those which are unfading and eternal. As we are only travellers through this world to an untried state of being, we should be moderate in our wishes, and contented with our lot. In our race from time to eternity, our burden should be light, and our incumbrances few. Instead of making difficulties, we should try to overcome them,—and act like those, who have not a moment to trifle with,—who have a prize in view,—whose temptations are numerous, but whose reward

is glorious,—and whose home is in heaven!—Were this the prevailing temper of our minds, what a different path we should pursue!—The world, with all its fascinating charms, would sink in our esteem; and Christ, the Redeemer of the guilty, would be the basis of our hopes, the object of our faith, and the perfect completion of our joys. I shall now close my discourse by considering, lastly, the improvement we should make of the brevity of life.

Instead of trifling with our time in uninteresting pursuits, we should be active, diligent, and faithful in the duties of our respective stations; invariably remembering that tremendous account which we must one day render to the almighty Judge of quick and dead. This thought, whenever it has its due impression on the mind, will influence our conduct, and regulate our behaviour. It will teach us, that however secret our projects, or concealed our schemes, we cannot elude the eye of omniscience, who compasseth our path, and who knoweth all our ways. As a view of the brevity of life should make us industrious in our respective callings, so it should above all teach

us, that it is absolutely necessary to our security, that we should live in a constant state of preparation for death, knowing that our time is at most but short, and may be very soon at an end. Who that reflected on the value of his immortal, never-dying soul, would live in the habitual neglect of prayer, meditation, and a due attendance on the means of grace? Who, that considered there is but a step betwixt us and death, would trifle with eternity?—Soon will our fate be irreversibly fixed, in heaven, or hell; why do we then risque our chief interest on the slender thread of life? As death leaves us, so will judgment find us; and if we quit the world without faith in Christ, or repentance towards God, it will then be too late to remedy our error. "Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation;"—tomorrow may fix our doom!—Let us then not only almost, but altogether be persuaded to become Christians, that we may not only be convinced of the evil of sin, but may also be converted from the error of our ways, that our affections, which have hitherto preferred the way of ungodly men, may now be directed into a purer channel, and truly dedicated to God.

Again,—the brevity of life should lessen our value for worldly enjoyments, and increase our reverence for religion. The busy scene in which we are now occupied, will soon be over, but eternity knows no limit of duration!—We are now arrived at the end of another year, and are admonished, by the rapid progress of time, to consider the things which belong to our peace, before they are for ever hid from our eyes. To those who are really united to Christ by a living faith, the swift wings of time are hastening them to a world of bliss; and they may rejoice at every closing year, which brings them nearer to their proper home. Let us then remember, that "All flesh is grass, and all the glory of man, as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away; but the word of the Lord endureth for ever."*

In a reviewal of our conduct through the past year, we have been able to detect our former errors, to discover the fallacy of mistaken notions, and to trace the progress of many schemes which only glittered to

* I. PETER, i. 24, 25.

deceive. We are thus enabled to form a proper estimate of life, not from the mere beginning of events, but from the maturer decisions of their end. We now see abundant reason to correct the ardour and impetuosity of youth; to profit by the lessons of experience, and to suspend our opinions of many things which we have once too hastily applauded, or condemned. In the fervour of expectation, the earthly objects which we are anxious to attain, are magnified to the view; but on a nearer approach they diminish, and evince their comparative insignificance, and folly. Let us then at the close of the year seriously consider, what we have been so busily engaged in; and calmly reflect, whether our general pursuits have repaid our unabating ardour. Let the impressive thought that we cannot recall our past time, teach us to improve the space that may be allotted us in future to the glory of God, and the welfare of our immortal souls! Thus shall we be anticipating the view of a grander scene, when we shall join the blessed company above, who are "before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple, and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They

shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more: neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."*

* Rev. vii. 15, 16, 17.

SERMON XI.

ROMANS, IV. VER. 2.

"For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory,—but not before God."

THE proper distinctions betwixt those virtues which have every claim to merit amongst men; and the nature, qualities, or degree of a righteousness calculated to justify us before a pure, and holy God; ought to be steadily, and accurately maintained. Owing to the want of just discriminations in these important points, various controversies have arisen amongst men, who have been mutually actuated by a love of truth. Hence St. Paul, the great apostle of the Gentiles, hath arranged these distinct ideas with a precision peculiar to the inspired writings. As the Jews expected to be justified by an outward conformity to the law of Moses; the apostle

shews, that the gospel not only perpetuates, but extends the influence of religion, and requires the obedience of the heart. Having in a former chapter proved by a process of masterly reasoning, that "by the deeds of the law no flesh living can be justified," he confirms this important truth by an appeal to the exemplary, and distinguished character of Abraham, whose eminent virtues the Jews profess to reverence, and admire.—"What shall we say then, that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?"—the apostle answers this question in the words of my text,—"For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory,—but not before God." For the further discussion of these words, I shall consider,

1st. The nature of a justifying righteousness.

2d. The importance of being fully convinced of our own weakness and depravity.

3d. The obligations we are under to evince the nature of our faith, by the fruits of a holy life.

It is one of the brilliant properties of the Christian religion, that it is perfectly adapted to the wants, and condition of human nature. Other theories have described what we ought to do; but this enables us to practise it. The aids of the Holy Spirit are here promised to all who sincerely ask them, that we may be enabled to resist temptation, to pray with unabating fervour, and to live in a state of real devotedness to God. Thus a religion whose law is love, whose motive is gratitude, and whose precepts enjoin us to avoid even the appearance of evil; will lead us to seek our final acceptance with God, in a way that shall glorify the divine attributes, humble the pride of man, and unite the claims of justice and mercy! Whilst it strongly enforces every moral obligation, and recommends the practice of every virtue; it cannot permit fallen creatures to arrogate those claims to merit, which even innocence, or unoffending rectitude, would not presume thus imperiously to require.

The apostle selected the bright example of Abraham, to convince the Jews of their mistaken notions respecting justification before

God. And as they gloried much in their relation to Abraham, he plainly shews them, that both Jews, and Gentiles, must be justified through faith in the Redeemer. The character of Abraham, as recorded in holy writ, is marked with peculiar celebrity, and excellence. Whilst surrounding nations were plunged into the errors of idolatry, and bowed the knee to every idol of superstition, Abraham steadily worshipped the one true God! And when, as a trial of his faith, and obedience, even his only, his beloved child Isaac, was required as an offering to God, he instantly obeyed the command, without the smallest hesitation or delay. It was enough for him that God had commanded; and, therefore, he obeyed. Even at an advanced age he travelled to a distant country to offer up his beloved Isaac, in obedience to the divine injunction. "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God: and being fully persuaded that what he had promised, he was able also to perform."* The affecting narrative of the venerable patriarch, who is about to plunge

* Rom. iv. 20, 21.

the knife into the bosom of his own child, is related with that artless simplicity, which is peculiar to the pages of inspiration.—"Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son, and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and they went both of them together."—What mind is there, capable of the smallest tenderness, and sympathy, but must enter into the feelings of the ancient patriarch?—His faith was tried; Isaac was spared; and God provided himself a lamb for a burnt offering. Yet amidst this brilliant career of virtue,—this triumph of faith,—this pattern of resignation,—the apostle assures us, that although Abraham might have "whereof to glory, yet not before God." And if an instance of patience, and submission, of confidence, and hope, so resplendent, could not presume to plead any merit before God; how can our defective virtues, our imperfect works, have the remotest claim to excellence before God, in whose eyes the very heavens are not pure? Is it possible that our prayers, which are mingled with levity, and inattention; or our acts of charity, which are only returning the benefits entrusted, or lent to us for a time,

can be pleaded as meritorious before the majesty of heaven?—After we have done all, we are but unprofitable servants, and have only done that which it was our duty to do.

The disposition of mind with which creatures can approach their Creator, must be humble, contrite, penitent, and submissive; deeply impressed with an idea of their own unworthiness; and willing to renounce every plea of merit. The Jews contended most vigorously for a legal righteousness, and therefore St. Paul appeals to the case of Abraham, their father, and asks, "as pertaining to the flesh what hath he found?"—Was he justified by his external privileges, and performances? or was it the merit of his works that recommended him to the favour of God?—The inference is, that if even Abraham, distinguished as he was, could be justified by works, there would be room for boasting;—and this must be for ever excluded. The idea of petitioners for mercy boasting of their goodness, and claiming the benefits they receive, is irrational, contradictory, impious, and absurd. The most eminent believers may have whereof to glory before

men; but the best of men can have nothing to boast of before the God who formed them, and who hath an unrivalled claim to the uniform obedience of his creatures. Hence it is that perfection must enter into the nature, and form an indispensible quality of a justifying righteousness. For the law of God, which is holy, just, and good, retains its claims to our undeviating obedience, amidst the numerous changes that take place in our conduct, and behaviour. Founded on the unerring basis of truth, and wisdom, its precepts cannot alter with the varying fashions of the hour. We are assured by our divine Redeemer, that,—"Till heaven and earth pass, one jot, or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled."* As a transcript of the divine perfections, it cannot be defaced by the corruptions of human depravity; or abate in any of its demands. "He who offendeth in one point, is guilty of the whole." Thus a justifying righteousness must be commensurate to all the demands of this holy law. It must be accomplished by one who is pure, and unspotted; who has no crimes or offences to an-

* St. Matt. v. 18.

swer for; whose power, dignity, and excellence will magnify the law, and make it honourable; and who can fulfil every claim to the utmost extent. No mere creature is equal to the arduous, to the mighty task, of ransoming the guilty; and therefore Christ hath done it by the price of his own blood. Well then might the apostle affirm, that "such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens. Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for their own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself."* Christ, by his active, and passive obedience, hath evinced, that he came not to destroy, but to fulfil the law; and to unite in one unparalleled act of love, the distinct attributes of justice, and mercy.

Thus it is the nature of a justifying righteousness, to be compleat in measure, and degree, without any possible deficiency, error, or imperfection. Hence Christ is the Lord our righteousness, who hath borne our offences

* Heb. vii. 26, 27.

in his own body on the tree, and by whose stripes we are healed. The merit of his perfect obedience is imputed unto us by faith; and we are delivered from the condemnation of the law, by virtue of that finished atonement which Christ hath wrought out. Referring therefore to the ignorance of those Jews, who expected to be justified by a legal righteousness, or by an outward conformity to the law, the apostle says,—"For I bear them record, that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth."* As nothing can avail in the business of justification, but what is entirely perfect, and answerable to every demand of the law; so we are considered righteous in Christ, through the imputation of his merits, and obedience. Faith is the mean by which we receive the righteousness of Christ. But the comfort arising from this justifying righteousness, (says the learned

* Rom. x. 2, 3, 4.

Witsius,) 'is not applied to the believer, till he is regenerated, and united to Christ by faith. Till then he is in the present evil world, [Gal. i. 4.] alienated, and an enemy, and under the power of darkness. [Col. i. 13, 21.] But immediately on his receiving Christ by faith, God declares in the court of heaven, that he is no longer under wrath, but under grace, though perhaps the justified person may yet be ignorant of it.'

Lastly, it is necessary to remark, that altho' we are delivered from the condemnatory power of the law by faith in Christ, yet we are not released from its holy injunctions as a rule of life. So far is the grace of God from having the remotest tendency to licentiousness, that it teaches us to deny ungodliness, and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present evil world. Instead of lessening, it increases our obligations to a holy life, and furnishes us with the noblest motives to the practice of every virtue. But if the graces of faith, repentance, and humility be wanting, our sublimest works cannot be acceptable to him, who "resisteth the proud, but

giveth grace unto the humble."* This leads me to consider next, the importance of being fully convinced of our own weakness and depravity.

From mistaken notions of human nature, the most fatal errors have arisen. Men have been hereby led to attempt, what they could not execute; and to anticipate final happiness in a way, that it never can be attained. From this delusion, the common effect of pride, and unbelief, men have thought too highly of their virtues, and too little of their vices. Without reflecting how far their best works, if weighed in the balance of a holy law, would be found wanting, they have reared the baseless fabric of expectation on their own imaginary goodness. And if we duly consider our condition as offenders against God, we shall never rightly value our mercies, unless we are convinced of our crimes. We shall view every benefit we receive as due to our merit, and thus destroy every principle of gratitude in the receiver. And if we are not apprized of our weakness, how can we ask for divine assistance;

* St. James, iv. 6.

or if we do not really feel our unworthiness before God, how can we be humble, patient, and submissive? What must the prayers be of a man, who thinks he is good enough; or from what motives can our virtues spring, if we ignorantly suppose we are profitable to God? The freeness of divine grace, and the efficacy of Christ's atonement, will not be valued, if we think that by our own obedience we can be justified. If we are not convinced of sin, we shall reject the remedy placed before us in the gospel, and actually perish through our wilful unbelief. How can a man be disposed to praise God for mercies received, or to implore those which he stands in need of, if he is in no degree impressed with his own unworthiness? What repentance can we have for our past offences, if we have never once been humbled on account of them? Hence a deep, and abiding conviction of our weakness, and depravity, is of the utmost importance to our present and future welfare. For what is it but pride, that hinders men from confessing their guilt? or what is it but ignorance, and unbelief, that can induce men to aim at working out a righteousness of their own? It is of the greatest

importance, therefore, to be convinced of our depravity, that we may know our danger, be aware of our difficulties, be prepared to encounter them; and that we may seek for relief in a way, where alone it can be found. Hence our blessed Lord saith,—"I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."* Without a due sense of our weakness, and depravity, we shall indulge mistaken notions of future happiness,—of the way in which our offences can be pardoned,—of the guilt of our numerous transgressions: and thus, whilst we are dreaming of perfect security, we shall be in the utmost danger! Our faith will not be built on the right foundation; nor will our repentance be genuine, or sincere; but our works, as flowing from a defective principle, will have none of those qualities, which can alone render them acceptable to a pure and holy being.

I proceed now to shew, lastly, in a few words, the obligations we are under to evince the nature of our faith, by the fruits of a holy life.

* St. Matt. ix. 13.

Though our best deeds will not enable us to glory in them before God, on the score of merit; yet, they are not the less requisite, or necessary. The freeness with which a favour is conferred, does not supersede the duty of gratitude in those who receive it. On the contrary, as we owe every hope of obtaining the pardon of our sins to the unmerited grace of God; so we are under the strongest motives to abound in every moral virtue, and to evince our gratitude for benefits so unparalleled and great. Hath Christ endured the bitter agonies of the cross to expiate our offences; and can we crucify him afresh, and put him to an open shame? Can we look at Calvary, and behold the meek and lowly Jesus nailed to the accursed tree, and yet indulge those crimes which he bled, and died to atone for? Will no motives of tenderness, love, and affection, operate on our conduct? Do we not feel the conscious glow of gratitude towards that blessed Redeemer, who bore our offences in his own body on the tree? —"If ye love me," says the adorable Jesus, "keep my commandments."—And can we even think of his pity, and compassion towards the guilty race of Adam, without the strongest

emotions of love?—Thus when religion sits enthroned in the heart, and the affections are dedicated to God, our lives will be the constant emanations of piety, and the uniform tribute of obedience. Our duty will be our delight; and we shall say with David,—"I hate vain thoughts, but thy law do I love."* The gospel of Christ fixes the duties of morality on the basis of love. If a recollection of unparalleled mercies will not produce a holy and a virtuous life, what motives can regulate the actions, or govern the conduct?

Let us then remember, that although Abraham could not boast of his best works before a holy God, that we are still bound to the practice of every duty. And whilst we are continually striving against sin, and mortifying every corrupt appetite; we must confess, that, after all, we are only doing what we ought to do. Under an habitual, and humble persuasion of our own unworthiness, let us persevere in a course of well-doing, and be emulous to adorn every station that we fill by an uniform course of virtue:—so that, when we quit this vale of

* Psalm cxix. 113.

tears, we may be ranked amongst those who are thus described in the book of Revelations, —" And I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me,—Write, blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them."*

* Rev. xiv. 13.

SERMON XII.

HEBREWS, IX. PART OF VER. 27.

—"*It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.*"

THIS decree is daily, and hourly fulfilling in the world, amidst the hurry of business, the gaieties of pleasure, or the triumphs of ambition. Neither wisdom, or eloquence, fortitude, or courage, prudence, or care, can elude the shafts of death. Its universal mandate must be obeyed, though we are engaged in the most interesting pursuits, or be found on the eve of compleating the grandest projects. Yet, from the general conduct of mankind, who would imagine they could possibly be aware of this final, and important destiny? Who could ever suppose that rational, and intelligent creatures would barter health for

the illusions of the hour, and tread on a precipice without viewing their danger? Fatal as the infatuation confessedly is, yet it may be readily accounted for by the obvious proofs of human depravity, and the evident effects which have uniformly arisen from the deceitfulness of sin. No warnings will rouse men from their lethargy, until the Spirit of God alarms the conscience, and places their crimes in array before them, with all the claims of a perfect law, or the horrors of future punishment.—"Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways, and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place."* "Behold, ye trust in lying words that cannot profit. Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsly, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not?"—Instead of amusing men by prophesying smooth things, the prophet is enjoined to—"Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgressions, and the house of Jacob their sins."† Thus, amidst the various admonitions which an indulgent God hath re-

* JERE. vii. 3, 8, 9. † ISAIAH, lviii. 1.

peatedly given, to dissuade us from a course of vice, and immorality, none can be more impressive than the assurance, that,—" It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.

For the further discussion of these words I shall endeavour to consider,

1st. The proposition in the text.

2d. The duties incumbent on us, as dying, and accountable creatures.

Though man is placed so high in the scale of being, that the animal and vegetable creation unitedly contribute to his ease and comfort; though he is endued with the discriminating power of reason, with an excursive fancy, with a penetrating judgment, and with the vigour of intellect; yet he has so miserably perverted and abused these early gifts of heaven, that he has lost his primitive innocence, and is now a fallen, and depraved creature, reaping the fruits of aggravated transgressions. This awful fact is not only confirmed by the page of history,

which is little more than a register of crimes; but it is demonstrated by the manners of mankind; by the prevalence of vice; by the haughty maxims of infidelity; by the desolations of human woe; by the tortures of disease; and by the universal empire of death. When our first parents violated that moderate, and easy command, which was given as a test of obedience, they incurred the penalty which was justly due to their offence, and involved their whole posterity under condemnation. As our actual transgressions are a virtual approbation of Adam's offence, we cannot arraign the justice of God, in extending the decree of mortality to the whole human race. In order to give a scriptural account of the entrance of death into the world, we must view it under three distinct ideas:—1st, as the wages of sin; 2d, as the effect of the divine decree; 3d, as the sentence of the law. The glory of God, and the happiness of man, was the evident purpose of infinite wisdom at our original formation. Hence Adam was created holy, innocent, and pure, being formed after the divine image, and likeness, and placed in the bliss of Paradise, the heir of immortality.

The condition of man's happy life was obedience; or, in other words, that it should run parallel with his perseverance in his duty. But when our first parents disobeyed the positive command of their Maker, death made its tragic entrance into our world, with all its gloomy appendages of human woe, as the wages, and punishment of sin. Unto Adam the Lord said, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."* This was the direful and humiliating fruit of voluntary transgression. From this fatal moment, the race of Adam has been exposed to innumerable trials, painful diseases, bitter disappointments, and accumulated woe. Sin, that secret, and insidious enemy, which we are too apt to cherish, and indulge; for whose constant solicitations to evil, we vainly plead every frivolous excuse; this fatal harbinger of woe, has reduced us from the lofty heights of immortality, to the gloomy chambers of the grave. There, the most beautiful form, or the most elevated rank, must submit to the common destiny of man,

* Gen. iii. 19.

and become a prey to worms! Hence Job saith,—"If I wait, the grave is mine house: I have made my bed in the darkness. I have said to corruption, thou art my father; to the worm, thou art my mother, and my sister."*

We are further to consider death as the effect of the divine decree, respecting sin. Had man retained his original innocence, none of those calamities which now desolate this lower world, would then have prevailed; but as we are universally concluded under sin, "It is appointed unto men once to die." Nothing can reverse, or counteract this solemn decree, which is hourly accomplishing on every rank, and degree of men, with equal and undistinguishing power, and influence. The same uncontroulable necessity of dying, involves all, without any regard to age, sex, dignity, or distinction. Death is called the king of terrors, not only from its tremendous importance, but also from its extensive sway. When the appointed hour arrives to call us hence, we cannot elude its warning, or resist its mandate. Even the vigour of youth, no less than hoary age,

* Job. xvii. 13, 14.

must obey the call of death, though it should come at a moment when they are least inclined to expect it. "There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that war, neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it."*

As death is a declarative proof of God's displeasure against all sin; so the manner in which this divine appointment is hourly accomplished, is a further demonstration of the fallen condition of man. Like a besom it sweeps off the human race, and depopulates towns and cities, states and empires, spreading the ravages of disease, with all the instruments of desolation and death. 'It is computed,' says a modern writer, 'by the ingenious in calculation, that, on the surface of the globe, more than fifty thousand mortals, men, women, and children, die every night.' 'How soon,' adds this excellent writer, 'may any one of us make an unit in the thousands that every hour go down into the pit, and are no more seen!'† The thought is confessedly awful, and more especi-

* Eccle. viii. 8. † Dr. Knox's Chr. Phil.

ally so when we consider death as the sentence of God's pure and holy law. Even in Paradise, God gave to his rational creature man, a law, as the rule of his future conduct. The tree of life was placed in the midst of the garden; and to this was annexed a strict injunction, not only as a proof of man's subjection, but as a trial of his obedience.—"But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die."* Thus, we may affirm with the apostle, that "the sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law."† Being by nature under the curse, and condemnation of the law of God, which we have universally broken, we are not only exposed in our unregenerate state, to temporal, but also to eternal death!—When the wicked are cut off in the midst of their sins, without faith in Christ, or repentance towards God, they are immediately to appear before their Judge, and receive the punishment due to their transgressions. Death is the gate to eternity, —the avenue to endless bliss, or misery. It will open to us a new, and untried state of

* Gen. ii. 17. † I. Cor. xv. 56.

being, in which our disembodied spirits will retain a consciousness of their past actions, and wait the ultimate award of retributive justice. When death has done its last office upon us, there will be no more opportunity for faith, repentance, or amendment of life. It will then be too late to alter our purposes, or to repent of our folly. If our minds be not previously changed by the power of converting grace, from the love of sin, to the love of holiness; there will be no device, nor work in the grave whither we are every one of us hastening! The ignorant delusion, that death is an eternal sleep, will then be found a ruinous mistake, only calculated to harden us in iniquity, and to fix our doom irretrievably amidst the bitter wailings of impenitent offenders. Were future annihilation within the pale of rational probability, the condition of the brutes would be more eligible than that of man. 'Their life, free from care, and the pain of reflection, is commonly dissolved by a momentary pang,—while man, furnished with the glorious apparatus of endless existence, with faculties impelling him to enter into the nature, and relations of it, to hope and wish for it, is to be like the brutes,

extinguished all at once, and for ever.'* This dream, invented by men who never wish to be awakened to a recollection of their past actions, is contrary to every principle of philosophy, to every dictate of reason, or to the uniform language of divine revelation!—Hence our text, after informing us, "It is appointed unto men, once to die;" adds,—"but after this, the judgment."

Lucretius (lib. 3, p. 655) owns, that 'no man is an atheist in distress.' And in the near views of death, and eternity, conscience will renew its claims, and demand an attentive hearing. We know that we have offended a pure and holy God; that we have been guilty of numerous offences which we had it in our power to avoid; that we have wasted our time; neglected our mercies; and have wilfully passed by the many warnings that are given us to repent. Of these plain truths, conscience, more or less, assures every man. This candle of the Lord, implanted in our breast, will not be extinguished by death, but will shine with unimpeded lustre the moment we appear before

* Baxter on the Soul.

our Judge. Then, it will either accuse, or excuse us; and bring to light many things which, in the hurry of business, or in the gaieties of pleasure, we have endeavoured to forget. All sins, whether secret or open, shall be accounted for. And even those omissions of our duty, which we are apt now to estimate too lightly; the guilt of these neglects, which have either arisen from the love of pleasure, indolence, or the like, will be heavily charged on the conscience of the sinner. "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."* All the sins of commission, whether in youth, or age, as "lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries, and all excess of riot, shall be accounted for to him who is ready to judge the quick, and the dead."—(See Ist Peter, iv. 3, 4, and 5.) Even every idle word, that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. And if even every vain word that is spoken, will be strictly enquired into, how much more those detracting, reproachful, or profane and blasphemous expressions, which

* St. James, iv. 17.

flow from the corrupt fountain of a depraved heart?—Were it possible to look beyond this vail of flesh, and behold the departing spirit of the unthinking profligate, the drunkard, the swearer, the adulterer, the fraudulent, or unjust, appearing before the tribunal of its righteous judge! What could it plead to extenuate a life of debauchery and vice, of prostituted talents, and perverted reason? How could it bear to hear the cries of seduced innocence, or of unprotected orphans, rending the air with accusations of guilt?—Can imagination picture a scene so awful, as the disembodied spirit doomed to the vengeance of eternal punishment, to dwell with the workers of iniquity?—"As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways, for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"*—But if thought could wing its way to a sublimer region, and behold the spirit of a true penitent appearing before its Judge, there we should hear nothing but the glorious plea of a crucified Redeemer,—of faith in the imputed righteousness of Christ,—of that

* EZEKIEL, xxxiii. 11.

fountain opened for sin, and for uncleanness. The proud arrogance of boasted merit, can never be pleaded by a petitioner for mercy;—but the all-prevailing merits, atonement, and death of Christ, will form the only basis of his hopes. Whatever works he had practised, will appear as the fruits of faith, as the trophies of love, as the incense of gratitude!—Then will the applauding Judge say,—"Come ye "blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you, from the foundation of the world."*

I proceed now to consider, lastly, the duties incumbent on us, as dying, and accountable creatures.

First, then, it is no less our duty, than our interest, to enquire how far we are habitually prepared for the approach of death. If, for instance, we reflected, that at an appointed time we must quit our present earthly abode, and change our company, place, and pursuits, to mix with disembodied spirits, either in a state of perfect happiness, or of endless misery;

* St. Matt. xxv. 34.

should we not enquire how far our prevailing temper, and practice, were adapted to the holiness of heaven?—The work of grace must be begun here, e'er it will be perfected in glory. Faith in Christ, repentance towards God, holy affections, and spiritual desires, must be experienced on earth, if we expect to arrive at the haven of joy. How can we be prepared for the presence of God, if we have no love to him? And how can we be said to love him, if we have no wish to please him? If all our thoughts are taken up with the business, the pleasures, and the honours of this life, so that we allow ourselves no time for prayer, meditation, or religious duties; how can we be prepared to enter a world, where spiritual employments will form its uninterrupted bliss? The man who lives in any allowed sin, can be in no state of preparation for death; as he who delights in the practice of any vice, cannot be fitted for perfect holiness.

As the chief business of our lives should be to prepare for death, it will be necessary that we should often seriously meditate on our latter end; realize that awful scene to the view;

banish every trifling levity of thought, or worldly care, that would intrude on these important moments: and lessen our fond attachment to a world, that is unworthy our supreme regard. We should often reflect, that we are only here like travellers on a journey, who cannot call one moment their own, and who are hastening from time to eternity.—"For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away."* Unfeigned faith in Christ, and genuine repentance for sin, are indispensibly necessary to prepare us for death. These are the immediate gifts of the Holy Spirit, which God hath promised to all who sincerely ask them. Christ hath taken away the sting of death, and redeemed us from the power of the grave. By his active, and passive obedience, we are also delivered from the curse of a broken law; and by the grace of his Holy Spirit, imparted to us, we are prepared for heaven. At the bar of judgment, we must be cloathed with the robe of Christ's righteousness, in order to be justified before a pure, and holy God. If we think of pleading the merit of our best works at that

* James iv. 14.

awful tribunal, our plea will be then rejected. For what virtue that we practise, will bear a strict, and scrutinous enquiry? It is through free, unmerited grace alone, that we are pardoned, justified, and eternally saved. Even the acceptance, and rewarding our best works, will be on account of the perfect righteousness of Christ. In him we shall stand compleat, though we have no merit of our own.

Again,—another duty devolves on us, as dying, and accountable creatures; that is, a frequent, and serious reviewal of our past lives; a steady regard to the admonitions of conscience; and an impartial enquiry into our prevailing habits, as those who must soon appear before him, by whom—"actions are weighed." Let us frequently judge ourselves by that tribunal, which is placed in our breast. Let us frequently ask, What have I done? How have I spent my time? Have I employed forty, fifty, or sixty years to glorify God, or merely to please myself? Have I made the law of God the rule of my life, or the law of fashion, and inclination? What spirit have I habitually indulged, the spirit of Christ, or the spirit of

the world? Hence, in a few words, it is our duty so to live the life of the righteous, that our last end may be like his. For he who would wish to die comfortably, must endeavour to live watchful and holy. Let us avoid that kind of company which is likely to corrupt our morals, to harden us in vice, or to lessen our reverence for religion. Let us beware of trusting to a death-bed repentance; for sincere conversions in the last moments of life are so rare, that God has left us but one instance of it in scripture,—even the thief upon the cross.—'Conversion in the last hour,' says one, 'is the most difficult thing in the world. The heart is bound by a thousand old habits long ago contracted, and which, like so many chains, prevent a freedom of action.' What can be more weak, and ruinous, than putting off repentance to old age, when we know not what an hour may produce?—"To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts:"* tomorrow may fix your destiny for ever!

Let us then, in all our actions, have so constant a reference to the day of judgment, that,

* Heb. iv. 7.

when death arrests us, we may not be unprepared at its arrival, or surprized at its warning to depart. To the wicked, death will be the avenue to punishment; but to those, who through faith in Christ have overcome the world, it will be only the portal of bliss, the gate of glory. They will be admitted to their Father's house,—to their proper home,—to join the company of the blessed above,—where there is fulness of joy, and where there are pleasures for evermore!

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